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CULTURAL LEADERS OF INDIA

Devotional Poets and Mystics

Part-I

TIRUMOOLAR ● NAYANMARS ● ALWARS ● ANDAL ● JNANESWAR
VIDYAPATI ● LAL DED ● KABIR ● SANKARA DEVA ● GURU NANAK
CHANDIDAS ● ARUNAGIRINATHA

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DEVOTIONAL POETS AND MYSTICS

PART I

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Vidyapati ● Lal Ded ● Kabir ● Sankaradeva ● Guru Nanak
Chandidas ● Arunagirinatha

General Editor : V. Raghavan

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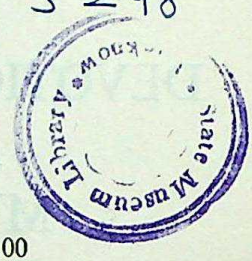

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The object of the series is to offer the general reader authentic accounts of the life and work of the great figures since the earliest times who have contributed in large measure to the culture and thought of India and influenced the mind and life of its people. The series will include about 125 such names—seers and philosophers, poets and dramatists, mystics and religious leaders, writers on science, aestheticians and composers.

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PREFACE

In the post-Sankara period, with the rise of Gorakhnath and the *Nath Sampradaya,* there arose in different parts of the country a line of Saints and Mystics who brought the wisdom of the ancients, the Rishis and the Acharyas, to the common people. They adopted the local language and used the medium of song in their mission. They were pilgrims, all the time moving among the people. They came from all classes and strata of the society, which in itself was the outcome of the universality and the basic oneness of men that they proclaimed. They might have risen in diverse schools of religion or philosophy, but all of them emphasised the fundamental truths and the eternal values. With satire and sarcasm, and in homely language with similes and symbols, they declaimed against hypocrisy and corruption, empty forms and rituals and all kinds of sham. Their plea was for sincerity of faith and fellowship of beings and integration of the whole man. With the fall of Hindu kingdoms the ideals and institutions of *Dharma* and *Bhakti* which they cherished were in peril. The minstrels of God, kept up the moral of the people and preached the superiority of spiritual values over mundane pursuits. They revitalised the devotion and faith, the *Bhakti* and *Sraddha,* of the classes and the masses. In the coming together of cultures, confrontation was not the only result; there was also a synthesis which gave rise to saints who bridged the gulf and spoke the same voice of integration.

The wide coverage that the subject provides has been kept in presenting these men of God. Because of their number and their detailed treatment, these devotional poets and mystics had to be included in two volumes. Some names may appear to have been left out, but they will appear in some other volumes, those on the Ramayana-Bharata-Bhagavata poets, teachers and musicians.

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In this volume representing Part One, twelve of these personalities are dealt with : five from Tamil Nadu in the South, two from the North-west (Punjab and Kashmir), one from Varanasi, and two from the East (Bengal and Assam). Two of these are women mystics, from two terminals of the land, one the Tamil 'Bride of the Lord' and the other who, denuded of everything mundane, including clothing, intoxicated with divine amrita, wandered and yet had her seat in the lap of the Lord. She, as also the weaver-saint of holy Varansi, are adored alike by Hindus and Muslims.

Two of the chapters here represent group-saints, the Tamil *Nayanmars* and *Alwars,* hymnists of Siva and Vishnu. The opening essay, also from the same language-area, relates to the line of 'realised souls', called *Sidhas,* although it deals in the main with the foremost among them.

The authors who have written on these Saints are scholars in their languages and writers of standing in the concerned fields of literature and culture. Well, read and dwell on the higher planes to which the Saints' lives and sayings uplift you.

V. RAGHAVAN

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TIRUMOOLAR

S. Maharajan

Tirumoolar is the greatest mystic and seer Tamil Nadu has ever produced. The eighteen Siddhas of Tamil Nadu acknowledge him as their supreme preceptor and as the progenitor of the esoteric school of the Tamils.

According to legend, Tirumoolar lived in 6000 B.C. However, modern scholars think that he must have lived between the 3rd century A.D. and the 5th century A.D. Sundaramoorti Nayanar, who is one of the four great Saints of Saivaism and who lived at the end of the 7th century A.D., has, in his *Tirutonda Togai,* referred to Tirumoolar and sung as follows :

I am the slave of the slaves
Of
My Lord, Tirumoolar.

This reference shows that Tirumoolar must have lived long enough before Sundaramoorti Nayanar to have become deified by that great saint as "My Lord."

The central message of Tirumoolar is, 'Love is God'. In his *Tirumantiram,* he sings :—

Senseless are they who say,
"Love and Siva are two".
They know not
It is Love that becomes Siva ;
The moment they know
That Love becomes Siva
That moment they'll remain
Rooted in Siva-as-Love.

Tirumoolar's life is a living illustration of his message. According to him, he was one of the four, who were initiated by Lord

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Siva himself, whom he refers to often as Nandi. He was an inhabitant of Mount Kailas in the Himalayas. One day he flew southward from the Himalayas to see saint Agasthiar, who had his Ashram in the Bothigai Hills, in the present Tirunelveli District. On the way, he alighted at Tiruvaduturai (in the present Tanjavur District) and after worship at the temple, proceeded to the Cauvery river nearby. On the bank of the Cauvery, he saw a herd of cows lamenting loudly and shedding copious tears. Moved by this sight, he looked around and found that Moolan, the shepherd, who had brought the flock to the river side, was lying dead. Flocking around the dead body, the cows were weeping. The Saint rushed to relieve the cows of their sorrow ; he put his physical body aside and with his astral body, entered the corpse of the shephered, Moolan, and stood up to the great rejoicing of the cows, and herded them back to the village of Sathanur, where Moolan had been living. The wife of the shepherd, Moolan, came and took him by the hand ; but Moolan, the Saint, resisted her and went into a *Matham* close by and entered into *Samadhi.* The wife's appeal to the villagers for restitution of her husband proved ineffective. Waking up from his trance, the Saint went to the place, where he had deposited his physical body, and found to his surprise that it had been cremated by the local people. Realising that this deprivation of his original body was part of Divine's grace, the Saint dwelling in the shepherd's body, went to the Tiruvaduturai temple and sitting under a tree, which is west of the temple and is still worshipped in memory of the Saint, he went into a trance again. Legend has it that once a year he would wake up from the *Samadhi,* sing one song in Tamil and go into Samadhi again and would wake up a year later. For three thousand years, he remained in meditation under this tree and sang 3,000 songs, one every year, the collection of which is called *Tirumantiram* (The Holy Incantation). After completing the *Tirumantiram.* Tirumoolar was satisfied that the mission of his life was over, and shedding the borrowed body, he disappeared into the mental world ; it is believed that he still lives in his mental body, directing the evolution of mankind. As the Saint sang the songs,

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while in the body of the shepherd Moolan, he came to be known as Tirumoolan or Tirumoolar (The Holy Moolar).

Tirumantiram is an encyclopaedia of authentic spiritual experience at almost all levels, that is to say, from idolatry to a disembodied absorption in the Ultimate Void. Tirumoolar is about the only Indian mystic, who has cared not only to record his experiences but also to evolve and communicate as elaborate technique, by following which other aspirants may reach the goal he had set for himself. It is true that the secrets discovered by Tirumoolar have been set down in highly symbolic language.

Even the intellectual is not qualified to obtain initiation into the secrets, unless he realises that the intellect is after all one of the most inadequate instruments given to man. It is in the awareness of human ignorance that Tirumoolar sees the beginnings of spiritual wisdom. Accordingly, in his preface to *Tirumantiram*, he sings with characteristic humour :

Whoever knows
The glories of My Lord :
And who,
The vastness of infinity :
Yet
Of my ignorance of that nameless Light
I shall sing
Three Thousand songs.

Einstein, the great scientist, standing on the brink of the known and peeping into the unknown, exclaims :—"How terrifying is my ignorance." Consciousness of ignorance, however, holds no terrors for Tirumoolar, in fact he exults and revels in it as the liberator from the Ego.

But even the man, who has become aware of his ignorance, is trammelled by the Ego. Tirumoolar would, therefore, urge him to go beyond knowledge and ignorance into Pure Consciousness. The Wisdom acquired through such unfettered consciousness can alone be regarded as having ultimate validity.

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Says Tirumoolar :—If you go beyond knowledge and ignorance into pure consciousness, ignorance of knowledge would be blisses, indeed."

How then are we to have access to the region of Pure Consciousness, where there is awareness but no thought ? The exact mechanism by which the different states of consciousness can be reached has been suggested by Tirumoolar in several places in his great work *Tirumantiram.*

The mind is located by Tirumoolar in a specific physical centre in the human body. This is very much like the gear box of an automobile. The mind can be said to be in the first gear when we are awake, in the second gear when we dream and in the third gear when we are in deep dreamless slumber. In other words, there are three physical states in the body corresponding to the three mental conditions viz., waking, dreaming and sleeping. When a waking man falls asleep, a corresponding involuntary change takes place in his physical condition. Likewise, when he drifts into the dreaming condition, an automatic physical change occurs. In their great spiritual laboratories our sages made this most momentous discovery and put it to immediate use. By physically manipulating the Centre, in which the mind resides, and by changing its gear, they found they could enter into any of these three mental conditions voluntarily and at will, retaining at the same time their awareness. They could, for instance, get into the deep slumber condition remaining aware or "awake". The Ego, which is like a prism distorting and refracting Reality, is itself asleep in slumber, and the *Gnani,* who can go into slumber without losing awareness, is in a position to have a glimpse of Reality, undistracted by the frolics of the Ego. Beyond slumber is the fourth condition of *Turiya,* where the Ego dies completely and the soul stands face to face with the Lord ready to melt in His embrace.

It is when the mystic finds himself in this condition of the utmost absorption that he is able to pierce the multifaced crust of Reality and perceive the Primordial and undifferentiated stuff

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of Being. Tirumoolar clarifies this truth with his famous analogy of a wooden toy elephant. He sings :—

The child played ecstatic with his elephant proud,
He cared not it was made of wood ;
Unplayful man beheld but a lump of wood,
He missed, alas ! the elephant's form ;
Even so, the Elements hide the Real from our sight,
But the Mystic's eye pierces through the Elements and gets at—God.

The fifth condition is *Turyatita* in which the merger of the *Atma* and *Paramatma* takes place.

Tirumoolar had a strong sense of his mission and he says that the main purpose of his birth was to put across divine truths in the Tamil language. In one stanza, he proclaims :—

The Lord has created me,
And created me well,
In order that
I may create Him in Tamil
And create Him well.

And in another place, he says :—

Let the whole of mankind derive from me
The spiritual ecstasy, which I have derived.

In a stanza of exquisite beauty and authenticity he describes his experience in *Samadhi,* in the following words :

The bounds of my Ego dissolved
and thereafter,
I could not conceive of anything which had bounds !

After I had become He, whom could I meditate upon !

In another place, Tirumoolar says that in this condition of trance, he started performing *Archana* (worship) to himself. Tirumantiram cousists of 3,000 songs, divided into 9 tantrams, or divisions. The strategy adopted by Tirumoolar in the introductory chapters is to impress upon the reader the pathetic

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mortality of Man, the evanascence of human youth and the transience of material wealth. This he does in words of incredible power and extraordinary vividness. In the whole range of Tamil literature, there is nothing to equal in power or vividness Tirumoolar's portrayal of the fleeting nature of man's life. For instance, here is a cameo, in which he paints the human predicament :—

She has cooked for him,
he eats to his heart's content,
He copulates with her
and then, he says,
"There's pain in my chest";
He lays himself down to rest
And lo ! and behold ! he's dead and gone.

After bringing home to the reader the temporal nature of human life, he calls upon him to contemplate the eternal verities of life. In unequivocal language he asserts :

Self-knowledge alone is knowledge,
Knowledge of anything other than self
Is Knowledge diabolical.

He, therefore, advises us to put ourselves under the microscope and study ourselves. He says :

Pierce your mind with your own mind
as penetratingly as possible;
If you sleep night and day thus wise with Grace,
even the stony mind will break,
And become limitless Space.

Though he expounds the doctrine of Saiva Siddhanta that *Pati* (God), *pasu* (Soul), *Pasam* (material attachment) are uncreated and uncreatable and eternally existent there are places in *Tirumantiram*, in which, while describing spiritual union with God, Tirumoolar seems to speak in Advaitic terms. For instance, he says in one song :

There are not two things
Called Siva and Jiva,

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Jiva knows not Siva,
After Jiva comes to know Siva,
Jiva becomes Siva.

At another place he says :—

Like the fragrance,
Inseparable from the flower,
Siva's fragrance inheres in the Jiva ;
Siva leaps forth and embraces
Those, who become still like a painting and understand
through silent awareness.

Though Tirumoolar adores God as Lord Siva, he is catholic enough to proclaim that all religions reach the same goal and that wrangling over the merits of the several approaches to God is foolish and futile. In fact, he would say :

My God laughs at those
Who say, "This way is better" or "That" and
give a double name
to man's approach to God ;
It matters not which way you approach Him.
Those approaching him devotedly
Will reach His habitation in a trice.

In one of his stanzas, he points the finger of scorn at champions of denominational religions and condemns them in the following words :

They attain not the Egoless experience,
as a pre-condition to which,
the inner-light should dawn upon their interior ;
They think not of inevitable death,
Nor do they yearn for freedom from birth;
They waste their time
Ceaselessly wrangling about the rituals
Of denominational religions,
And alas ! they are doomed for ever.

Tirumoolar thinks that the easiest way of approaching God

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is in and through the human body, in which God dwells. He says :

After wandering over the land, far and wide,
I discovered our Lord
In the land of this body !

According to Tirumoolar, there is a secret trap door in the body, by entering which one could contact divinity. It is by that trap door, according to Tirumoolar, the soul comes into the body at birth and it is through that trap door again that the soul goes out of the body at death. This Tirumoolar calls the magic way, a way, which, people, subject to the cycle of births and deaths, will not discover. This is a way which only the Guru can show :

It is the way through which, at birth,
the soul enters the body;
The same way through which, at death,
the soul gets out of the body;
It is the magic way,
which people, caught in the wheel of births and deaths, will never discover,
It is the way, which only the Guru can open—
the way, following which,
One can merge with God.

In order to emphasize the necessity for a Guru, Tirumoolar goes to the extent of discouraging direct worship of God. Says Tirumoolar :—

Countless are the Celestials
who have kept worshipping Siva,
But
nothing can come out of the worship of Siva;
If, however, you would worship the Guru
1 who can teach you
how to worship Siva,
You can achieve in no time
union with Siva.

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Once the Guru initiates you in the Unitive way, what happens ? Tirumoolar answers :

If you gain control over that horse
which can fly speedier than bird,
You need not consume intoxicants,
for there will be auto-generation of ecstasy,
It will make you walk
With spring-like steps
and cure you of all your sloth;
We utter this truth
to those alone,
who have the awareness to grasp it.

Tirumoolar has great contempt for the externals of Religion. On the contrary, he lays great emphasis on the inwardness of Religion. He warns :—

You may worship God
by burning tons of sandalwood
and piling flowers up to the sky ;
Unless you separate your flesh
from your consciousness
and meditate,
You will not reach the feet of the Lord.

According to Tirumoolar, God hides himself in a place where man is least likely to search for him, and that place is the mind of man ! With characteristic humour, he says :

Lest the wicked folk should discover him,
He hides himself in their minds !

According to him, an external pilgrimage from Kasi to Kanyakumari would not wipe off the sins of the people. What one should undertake is the interior pilgrimage. He says :

Several are the *Teerthas*
Found inside the mind ;
The unenlightened would not
dip themselves in the Holy waters of the mind
And wipe off their sins ;

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But, instead, those wicked men
roam wildly over hills and dales—fruitlessly.

(*Teerthas*-Holy waters)

Speaking of the *Sahasrara,* which is the culminating point of all Yogic practices, Tirumoolar sings a highly symbolic song in the following words :—

On top of that high mount,
Where an etheric cascade crawls,
There's a precious pond,
Which has no river to feed it,
but is yet filled with astral waters ;
There grows a creeper there
Springing otherwise than from the mire,
and on that creeper,
a lovely Lotus is in bloom ;
No flower will Siva wear
Except that Lotus which is in bloom.

Tirumoolar is probably the first Indian Saint who reconciled the Yogic approach with the Tantric approach. Yoga is Ego-oriented. But Tantra is non-Ego-oriented. Yoga says 'No' to many dominating impulses of life. But Tantra accepts the totality of life, evil as well as good. Even sex it accepts for the very purpose of transcending sex. Apart from expounding Ashtanga Yoga, Kesari Yoga, Chandra Yoga, Mantra Yoga and other Yogas, Tirumoolar deals with Paryanka Yoga, which literally means the Yoga of the Cot. This is the Yoga which uses sex for the purpose of transcending sex. The other Yogas, by laying down several commandments, create inhibitions in the human mind. In Paryanka Yoga, the practitioner is invited to make an uninhibited response to the demands of the body, in order that ultimately those demands may be sublimated into spiritual joy. One important song in Paryanka Yoga runs, when translated, as follows :

Lest the silver should melt
And flow into the gold,

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The cunning gold-smith
Closes the passage with coal.

These lines indicate the mechanism of sublimation which shall not be explained except by the Guru to his chosen disciple. Suffice it to say that by this Tantra, which is of momentous significance to human evolution, it is possible to arrest the downward pull of the sexual impulses, direct the same in the opposite direction and convert sex energy into the light of *Gnana*. The device described by Tirumoolar is clearly *tantric* in character. In a famous song, he says :—

They are fools who say,
"Control the senses five",
Even among the Immortals,
there's none who can do so ;
lest, by controlling the senses,
I should become inanimate,
I have acquired the Wisdom, which enables me *not* to control the senses.

Tirumoolar's attitude in this respect is refreshingly unorthodox. The senses are but the servants of the mind and have no volition of their own. He, therefore, declares that it is dangerous to impose any restraint upon the senses. That will be tackling the mind from the wrong end. Every such restraint is bound to create an inhibition in the mind and thereby further complicate the Subconscious. He suggests that the mind (conscious and sub-conscious) should be treated in such a way that an effective disjunction between the mind and the senses is brought about. When one has acquired mastery of the mind, not by subduing it, but by going round it, he gains freedom from the senses by transcending them without controlling them.

It is said that while Saint Francis of Assisi was on his death bed, he realized the spiritual utility of the human body and expressed his thanks to the body for having enabled him to realise God. Tirumoolar makes a similar statement :—

Once I thought the body was something

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vulgar and mean,
But now I know that inside the body and only
through it,
Can I get at Reality.

It is Tirumoolar's view that the dignity of the body is almost as great as that of the spirit. To him the human body is not an execrable delusion, but a divine gift to be treasured. In fact, he calls every human being a walking temple of God and adds that any offering made to this temple is more readily accepted by God than the offerings made in the stone temples of God. In one song he says that the mental body (which is even bigger than the physical body of man) is the big temple of God, that the physical body is the shrine within the big temple, that the mouth is the gate-way to the *sanctum sanctorum,* that the *Jiva* is the Sivalingam and the five-wicked-seeming senses are the eternal foot-lights that light up the glory of the Lord.

One must make spiritual hay, while the bodily sun shines; for, the moment the body is lost, experience comes to an end, and consequently, the opportunity of emancipation comes to an end, too. That is why Tirumoolar exclaims :—

By developing my body,
I developed my spirit, too.

To Tirumoolar bodily health is only a means to a spiritual end and not an end in itself.

By opening certain secret centres of the body, he is able to witness the joyous dance of Lord Nataraja and to sing :—

He dances with Kali
and then, on the Golden Mount,
He dances with the ghosts
and then, on the Earth ;
He dances in the Elements of
Water, Fire, Wind and Ether
And dance does he in the limitless expanse
of consciousness.

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Tirumoolar describles his bodily reactions to the dance of Siva in thrilling terms :—

Even as the sight of tamarind
makes your tongue water,
the sight of the charming dance of Nataraja
makes your eyes water,
your heart melt,
and joyous ambrosia ooze out of your
Inner Light.

Tirumoolar says that by the grace of God he acquired the eightfold Siddhi (*Ashta maha siddhis*) and that he disseminated knowledge of the same by going in the eight directions. There are as many as 30 stanzas in *Tirumantiram* in which detailed instructions are given as to how one could obtain the faculty of getting out of one's body and entering the body of another (*Parakayapravesa*). Tirumoolar lays down certain tests by which the sex of a child can be determined even at the moment of conception.

On the whole, *Tirumantiram* gives solutions to problems, which have great contemporary relevance. It makes an audacious attempt to integrate the Here with the Hereafter. The emphasis is throughout laid on the quintessence of life and spirituality as contrasted with the superficial and sidetracking externals of denominational religions. Evidently, at the time of Tirumoolar, men of religion had missed the wood for the trees, and fire sacrifices and rituals galore were the order of the day. Tirumoolar protests against this kind of extravaganza in words of lofty disdain and wants men to turn the searchlight inwards. His poetry, which is direct and simple and sometimes rugged, has an explosive power and a finality of tone. These qualities are derived from the clarity and authenticity of his own personal experience.

But some of his songs are so adroitly constructed as to have different layers of meaning for persons having different levels of spiritual attainment. A song, which would convey

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one meaning to a person in a lower stage of evolution, would convey another meaning to him after he has evolved to a higher stage of evolution. Tirumoolar is undoubtedly the most versatile spiritual genius produced by Tamil Nadu and the greatest Master of *Tapas*—a title which, according to Tirumoolar, Lord Siva himself conferred upon him. Says he :—

I invoked Siva
Calling Him the Lord of Lords ;
Forthwith he appeared before me,
Calling me, "Oh, Lord of Tapas !

(*Tapas* : Meditation)

In fact, the Tamil School of Siddhas acknowledges Tirumoolar as the father of the school. Tayumanavar one of our greatest saints and *Siddhas,* in his songs calls Tirmoolar the *Chakravarti* (Emperor) among *Tapasvins* (Meditators) and prays reverently for his grace. The Siddha school is marked by special characteristics; in the first place, it denounces the caste system and preaches equality of all men; in the second place, it discourages idol-worship, and condemns ritualism; in the third place, it lays stress on meditation upon the in-dwelling God and as a means to self-realization, it advocates different kinds of Yoga including Kundalini Yoga and Gnana Yoga and resort to *tantric* practices and complete reliance on the Guru. Though most of them use the word 'Siva' to denote God, their religion is universal and undenominational.

To one family doth mankind belong,
and its God
is One
and One only.

Gunankudi Masthan, a Tamil Muslim is reckoned as a Siddha and his teachings are hardly distinguishable from those of the other Siddhas except for the fact that he occasionally uses Muslim jargon in the place of Saivite jargon.

Sivavakkiar, another Siddha who lived probably between the

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6th century A.D. and the 8th century A.D. condemns idol-worship in the following terms :—

You plant a stone,
throw a few flowers over it,
go round it,
and mutter some *mantras ;*
When the Lord is inside you,
Can the planted stone speak ?
Can the pot
taste the food it has cooked ?
Or the ladle ?

Some of the most moving spiritual hymns are to be found in the work of Pattinattar, who is a Siddha belonging to the 10th century. He describes the human body "as the blacksmith's bellows which fan the fire of anger", as "the cage of the bird called the five-fold senses", as "the hollow in the tree out of which sorrow rises unendingly", as "the rotating top, whipped up by the string of desire", as "the fan that rotates with the aid of money-power" and as the "boat, laden with the cargo of sin, launched upon the sea of births, blown by the whirl-wind of lust and running aground into the shore of evil" and so on.

Bhadragiriar, the disciple of Pattinattar, was also a noted Siddha. His impatient cry is :

When will you burn the Sastras,
falsify the Four Vedas
and gret rid of Sorrow,
by discovering the controlling centre of Life ?

Of the later Siddhas, who lived between the 11th century and the 19th century, mention may be made of Pambatti Siddhar, Ahappey Siddhar, Kudambai Siddhar, Kaduveli Siddhar and Azhuhini Siddhar. One of them sings :—

To those who are in the state of
heightened awareness
and are brimming over with joy,
even Gnana is superfluous.

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The latest, certainly not the last, of the Siddhas was Ramalinga Swamigal, who lived in the 19th century. He has decanted his mystical experience in mellifluous poetry. He also sings :—

I renounced the wranglings
Of caste and religion
At once,
I saw the Gracious Light of God ;
I renounced Falsehood
and marched ahead
and the Lord revealed Himself unto me.

Thus we find that the golden thread of a universal religion runs through the works of the Siddhas from Tirumoolar to Ramalingar and binds them into a distinctive and unique mystic fraternity.

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NAYANMARS

V. A. Devasenapathi

Nayanmars were the devotees of Siva. They were strong in their conviction that all living beings are the servants of the Lord and that every kind of object is His possession. They were clear in their minds that the truth could not be otherwise. The word *Nayanmars* means 'leaders' or 'chieftains'. They were raised to this status because of their unswerving allegiance to the Lord. Themselves servants of the Lord or of His servants, they came to be regarded as lords !

It is usual to refer to the Nayanmars as sixty-three. But it must not be concluded from this that there were only sixty-three. There were groups of devotees, e.g. the temple priests of Chidambaram, the scholars who owed no false allegiance, etc. In the *Tiruttondattokai* which gives a list of the Nayanmars, Saint Sundarar sings, 'I am the servant of the devotees beyond.' Sekkilar who has written an epic, known as the *Tiruttondar-puranam,* interprets the word 'beyond' as meaning 'beyond the geographical limits of Tamil Nadu and beyond the times of the devotees listed in the *Tiruttondattokai*". This means that the list must include those outside the limits of Tamil Nadu and also the predecessors and successors of those mentioned in the list. In one line Sundarar sums up the list :

> 'I am the servant of all those who worship the Lord as His devotees !'

We are thus made to realise that the fraternity of devotees belongs to all countries and all times.

There are three well-known works dealing with the lives of the Nayanmars—Saint Sundarar's *Tiruttondattokai,* Nambiyandar Nambi's *Tiruvandadi* and Sekkilar's *Tiruttondar-puranam,* popularly known as the *Periya-puranam.* The first refers to the

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Nayanmars in short telling phrases, the second gives a brief outline and the third is a much fuller treatment than either of the other two. The *Periya-puranam* is considered to be a religious and literary masterpiece.

In the Nayanmars we have a remarkable company of men and women. A few are ascetics but most of them are householders. Differing in age, caste, profession, literary attainment, etc., they are united by one common factor—their total devotion to the Lord and/or His devotees. It is remarkable that they allowed nothing to come between them and their devotion. They swept aside all considerations of caste, sex, age or social status. They thought, acted and felt as the servants of the Lord and His devotees. Hence they were not bothered by considerations of I and Mine.

The author of the *Periya-puranam* states their common characteristics in the following words :

> Some of the devotees were sought out by the Lord to receive His grace; some, out of the Love that filled their very being, felt the divine thrill ; some dedicated themselves to manual labour in the service of the Lord; and there were countless others besides these.
>
> These devotees were as pure within as the sacred ash which adorned their body. Their spiritual radiance illuminated everything around them. Their greatness can hardly be described in words.
>
> They were unswerving in their devotion to the Lord even if the very elements behaved contrary to their (elements) nature. They pursued the path of steadfast love and were the embodiment of all good qualities without the least blemish.
>
> Their spiritual wealth—unlike material wealth—was beyond the vicissitudes of loss and gain. They treated a piece of gold and potsherd alike—as pieces of matter. They worshipped because of the love that welled forth in them. They were of a heroic

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mould that did not care even for release. One can only bless their exalted state. How can one measure it and describe it ?

Some of the devotees did the well-nigh impossible—like offering the cooked flesh of one's only son to the Lord who came in the guise of a devotee or plucking out one's eye to stop the bleeding in the eyes of the Lord manifesting Himself in the idol. There were others who did what appears to be commonplace and a matter of mere routine, like gathering flowers for worship or washing the clothes of the devotees. But even here we find the same exalted devotion. What they did is not so important as how they did. Their worship and service took different forms but behind the diversity of forms we find the same spirit of utter, total dedication. The lives of some had an easy, peaceful course. But those of some others were beset by severe ordeals. Yet even these devotees were steadfast in their devotion. As one woman-saint, Karaikkal Ammaiyar, puts it : 'What, if He is not moved to pity ? What, if He does not reveal the path I am to pursue ? How can I cease loving Him when I have surrendered my heart to Him ?'

The Nayanmars were so utterly dedicated to the Lord or His devotees that they had no thought for anything else, least of all, for themselves. It was neither the prospect of heaven nor the fear of hell that made them seek God. In fact, as Manikkavachagar, a great Saivite poet, sings, 'They seek not lordly life ; they seek the company of none except that of devotees, even if they were to lose all worldly prosperity thereby ; and they accept stay even in hell, should the Lord will it that way.' This is heroism of the highest kind indeed. The love they cherish for the Lord gives them complete freedom from fear and inspires them with courage to face any danger. The secret of this fearlessness is revealed by Saint Appar in these words : 'Because we have drawn close to the Feet of the Lord who is the absolute sovereign, subject to none, we are irredeemably His bondsmen and thus owe allegiance to none else.'

The devotees pray not for gold, wealth and enjoyment but

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for the Lord's grace and love and righteousness. They inherit the tradition of the ancient Tamil poet who said : 'The purpose of our repeated worship of Thee is that this worship should increase even as the fame of Thy ancient glory does !'

The devotees pray occasionally for favours to relieve the suffering of others. Miracles of raising the dead were performed by Jnanasambandhar, Appar (also known as Tirunavukkarasar) and Sundarar. When the Nayanmars display extraordinary powers, they make it clear that they derive these from the Lord and that they are merely instruments in His hands.

The Lord is not a metaphysical abstraction, to the Nayanmars. They are aware of standing in an intimate personal relationship to Him. This relationship is due to an irrevocable covenant between the Lord and the Nayanmars. In fact, the dramatic incident preceding Sundara's wedding is a forceful reminder of this covenant. When his wedding was about to take place, the Lord appeared as an aged Brahmin and insisted on the settlement of an issue between Himself and the bridegroom. He claimed the service of Sundarar saying that his grandfather had executed a deed pledging the services of himself and his descendants. On the face of it, this appeared to be a fantastic claim. But as the sequel showed, what the Lord claimed was the service of not only Sundarar but also that of all living beings to Himself. If the covenant calls for service from one party, it is no less insistent on the responsibility of the other party to protect the first party. This is expressed in the oft-quoted words of Appar : 'It is His duty to sustain (the likes of even) me; and mine to render service.' The Tamil word used in this context indicates that the service rendered is not to be done with any sense of agency but in the manner of an instrument in the hands of the Lord.

The relationship between two intelligent entities could be any one of the following : (1) master and servant, (2) father and son, (3) friend and friend, (4) teacher and pupil—or lover and beloved. It may appear as though we progress here from a for-

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mal external relationship to intimate personal union. But the interesting thing that we find in the lives of the Nayanmars is that each one of these promotes close intimacy. The Lord is eager to serve His devotees. We come across several incidents in the life of Sundarar testifying to this 'mad love' which the Lord has for His devotees. When the Lord claimed Sundarar as His slave, Sundarar laughed at Him and called Him a mad man. When subsequently the Lord made him realise the meaning of His claim and commanded him to offer worship with songs, Sundarar asked how he was to begin. The Lord replied that since Sundarar had called Him a mad man, he could begin with the same words. Sundarar began singing with the words, 'Oh, mad One'. But with what a change in the meaning of these words ! Madness did not mean in this context mental derangement or eccentric behaviour. It signified the unbounded love of the Lord for souls. It is necessary to note that while this divine love is unbounded, it is not mere sentimentality. It is a consuming fire. No quarter is given for lapses. Divine forgiveness is preceded by human repentance. Sundarar loses the sight of both his eyes when he breaks his pledged word. It is only when he repents sincerely and suffers for a time that vision is restored, first in one eye and then in the other. This is a salutary lesson for all human beings that the Lord's love does not set aside morality but promotes its consummation through a course of discipline which may sometimes be very severe indeed.

The Nayanmars are Saivites and the works dealing with their lives are considered a part of Saivite literature. Their lives can be said to illustrate the basic principles of *Saiva Siddhanta,* especially the course of religious discipline known as *charya, kriya, yoga* and *jnana.* Starting with external worship, the discipline leads the aspirant to interiority and ends in communion and union. Though some of the Nayanmars are considered as the exemplars of the lower stages of this discipline, a study of their lives reveals that they exemplified those stages for the guidance of aspirants in those stages. Inwardly they were on the highest level. Appar is said to have followed *dasa marga* and exemplified *charya* ; but some of his songs show his mastery of *yoga* and *jnana.*

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Songs expressive of bridal mysticism also are found in his *Tevaram*. Can the lives of the Nayanmars who worshipped Siva be of value to non-Saivites ? To answer this question, we need to recall the words of Tirumoolar who is one of the Nayanmars :

> Love and Siva are different, say the ignorant.
> Love is Siva—no one realises this
> Love is Siva—when they realise this
> In Love they abide as Siva.

Tirumoolar goes on to say that even if one uses the very bonse of one's body as fuel to roast one's flesh as an offering to the Lord, if one lacks the love that melts one's very being, the Lord will not manifest Himself.

It is such love—love that melts one's very being—that we find in the Nayanmars. Their modes of worship and service differ but behind them all is their unqualified love for the Lord and His devotees. Kannappar, an illiterate hunter-prince is hailed as the exemplar par excellence of such love. His mode of worship was unconventional but his whole being vibrated with love for the Lord. His thoughts, actions and feelings were all centred on the Lord. Manikkavachagar and Adi Sankarar have sung his praises.

Devotees are praised because they radiate divine light. They 'practise the presence of God' all the time and hence to be in their company is itself spiritually beneficial. Their presence is considered to be so potent as to destroy one's *karma*.

'Our *karma* is snapped and destroyed because we are in the company of the devotees,' sings Jnanasambandhar. 'Have I earned the merit to be in the company of those whose love for the Lord is genuine ?' asks Appar. 'I am the devotee of devotees', sings Sundarar. Manikkavachagar expressed his astonishment at being admitted by the Lord to the company of His devotees.

Does the Lord seek the Nayanmars or do they seek Him ? We have instances of both. But even where the devotees seem

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to seek him, the impulse for the search comes from the Lord. But such is His love for the devotees that He Himself describes their exalted state to Sundarar in the following words :

'They are like only unto themselves in their greatness (i.e. there is none to equal or excel them); because of their devotion to Me, they have gained Me; by their one-pointedness they have overcome the world ; they have no deficiency of any kind ; they are well established in their exalted state; by virtue of their love they experience joy ; they have gone beyond duality.'

The southern part of Tamil Nadu which was under the Pandyas came under the sway of the Kalabhras at the commencement of the third century A.D. Its northern part, called Tondainadu, came under the rule of the Pallavas from the middle of the third century. Thus the whole of Tamil Nadu happened to be ruled over by persons whose mother-tongue was not Tamil with the result that there was no encouragement for the growth of Tamil literature and culture. The third, fourth and fifth centuries were, on the whole, a time of eclipse for the Tamils and their way of life, though even during this period some important ethical and religious works did appear in Tamil. The fifth century A.D. witnessed the decline of Buddhism and the gradual ascendency of Jainism in Tamil Nadu. Of the Saivite Nayanmars, Karaikkal Ammaiyar, a woman-saint and Sant Tirumoolar are usually assigned to the fifth century. Saint Tirunavukkarasar and Saint Tirujnanasambandhar, his younger contemporary, were chiefly responsible for the revival of Saivism and the eclipse of Jainism in Tamil Nadu. Their hymns glorify the Vedas and the ancient sacred way of life (*tolneri, tiruneri*) of the Tamils. The history of Saivism certainly and the culture of the Tamils possibly would have been very different had it not been for the emergence of the Nayanmars who proclaimed the glory of their faith in God by steadfast devotion to Him and by service to His creatures. The systematisation of *Saiva Siddhanta* followed the period of the Nayanmars and drew its authority from their life and teachings.

Scholars are unanimous in their view that the hymns have

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a high literary quality. In fact, some of them consider these hymns as a class by themselves, by far the best in the Tamil language and literature. Adoration of the Lord in inimitable language is the first and foremost excellence of these hymns. Description of nature is apt and graphic. Fully alive to the beauty of nature, the Nayanmars lead us from a contemplation of the beauty of nature, to the beauty of the author thereof. Human emotions, exaltation in communion with the Lord, depression in separation from Him, poignancies of life, all these find frequent expression in their hymns. Life, as it is usually led and as it ought to be led, is shown in clear relief. Nature, man and God in the ascending order of importance figure in their composition and thus there is a fullness about them which is hard to find in works of Tamil literature where only one or other of these basic themes comes in for treatment. Later writers with a sensitivity to good literature weave the phrases of these master-singers into their own compositions.

The hymns of the Nayanmars are sung and are meant to be sung. Twenty-three melody patterns (called *pan*) have survived to this day. They are appropriate to various parts of the day and night and are expressive of different emotions. The practice of singing in temples is referred to in the hymns of the Nayanmars and in due course their own hymns came to be sung. Kings and rich devotees made endowments for paying the singers, known as *Oduvars*. Even on a conservative reckoning, the singing of *Tevaram, Tiruvachagam* and other hymns has been in vogue for more than a thousand years. At the conclusion of the worship in the temples, these hymns are sung in the traditional way. It is also usual for *bhajan* parties to accompany the deity in a procession, singing these hymns. Like the *Divyaprabandham* of the Alwars, these hymns are the cherished possession of the Tamils.

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ALWARS

A. Srinivasa Raghavan

'Alwars' is the name by which twelve Vaishnava religious poets of Tamil Nadu are known. *Alwar* in Tamil has been interpreted as one 'immersed', here, in love of God. The term Alwar is added to the names of the poets as in Poigai Alwar, Pey Alwar. The names given to some of them at birth are not known and the names current are those associated with their places of birth, e.g. Poigai Alwar (Alwar who was born in a pool), Tirumazhisai Alwar (the Alwar who was born in the village Tirumazhisai). In some cases, the names assigned to them at birth have given place to names associated with their characteristics or to names which indicate the devotion of followers. Thus Maran is known as Nammalwar (our Alwar), Vishnuchitta is called Periya Alwar (the great Alwar), Vipra Narayana is designated as Tondaradippodi (the dust of the feet of those who serve the Lord), Nilan is known as Tirumangai, Godai, the poetess, is named Andal (she who rules, she who accepts us and is our refuge) and Tiruppan is called so because he was a singer. *Panan* in Tamil means a professional singer or one born in the *Panan* caste.

The following are the names by which the Alwars are generally known in Tamil Vaishnava tradition :

> Poigai, Bhutattalwar, Pey, Tirumazhisai, Kulasekhara, Periyalwar, Andal, Tondaradippodi, Tiruppan, Tirumangai, Nammalwar and Madhurakavi.

These Alwars came from different sections of the community. Poigai, Bhutam and Pey are ascribed miraculous birth, Poigai in a golden lotus in a pool, Bhutan in a *madhavi* flower, and Pey

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in a red lily. Tirumazhisai is considered as the son of Bhargava, a *rishi*. Periyalwar, Tondaradippodi and Madhurakavi were Brahmins, Andal was a foundling adopted by Periyalwar, Kulasekhara was a Kshatriya, Nammalwar and Tirumangai were non-Brahmins, one a *vellala* (cultivator) and the other a *Kalla* (robber) and Tiruppan was a Harijan. Vaishnava religious tradition considers every one of these Alwars as the *avatara* or incarn-a tion of something connected with Maha Vishnu, the Supreme One. Thus Poigai, Bhutam and Pey are the conch, the staff and the sword of Vishnu, Tirumazhisai is the discus, Periyalwar is Vishnu's mount, *Garuda,* and Andal is Bhumi Devi. The other Alwars are considered as the *avataras* of *Vaijayanti* (the garland of Vishnu), *Kausthubha,* (the jewel that Vishnu wears), *Srivatsa* (the mark on Vishnu's chest) and Vishnu's bow.

According to the account given in *Guru Parampara,* the lives of these Alwars are filled with miracles. There is no way now of ascertaining the truth of these and we have to accept them as the crystallisation in legendary form of the faith of generations. Some of the accounts are very moving and beautiful and if properly interpreted may lead to a richer understanding of the works of the Alwars. We have no time to dwell on them and subject them to historical and other tests. It may be stated, however, that the life of each one of the Alwars as recorded by tradition is a piece of poetry as significant as the poems they have left behind, throwing a flood of light on their inner life as it was interpreted by succeeding Vaishnava devotees and thinkers.

The age of the Alwars has been pushed back by Tamil Vaishnava theologians. Thus Nammalwar is supposed by devout Vaishnavas to have lived a little before the commencement of *Kali Yuga,* more than five thousand years ago. Tradition has it that some of the other Alwars lived earlier. Modern scholars, however, do not agree with this view; and though there is disagreement among them about the age of the Alwars and the chronological order in which they are to be placed, it is now generally accepted that the Alwars must be placed in a period stretching from the sixth century A.D. to the early part of the

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tenth century. Inscriptions, references within their works and the nature of the Tamil language employed by them form the evidence that has led to his conclusion.

The work of the Alwars is known as the *Nalayira Divya Prabandham* (the Divine Four Thousand). The works of the various Alwars are as under :

Periyalwar :	*Tiruppallandu* *Periyalwar Tirumozhi*
Andal :	*Tiruppavai* *Nachiyar Tirumozhi*
Kulasekhara :	*Perumal Tirumozhi*
Tirumazhisai :	*Tiruchanda Viruttam* *Nanmukan Tiruvantadi*
Tondaradippodi :	*Tirumalai* *Tiruppalli Ezhuchi*
Tiruppan :	*Amalanadippiran*
Madhurakavi :	*Kanninun Chiruttambu*
Tirumangai :	*Periya Tirumozhi* *Tiruneduntantakam* *Tirukkuruntantakam* *Tiruvezhukkootrirukkai* *Chiria Tirumadal* *Periya Tirumadal*
Poigai :	*Mutal Tiruvantadi*
Bhutam :	*Irandam Tiruvantadi* *Moonram Tiruvantadi*
Nammalwar :	*Tiruvaimozhi* *Tiruviruttam* *Tiruvasiriyam* *Periya Tiruvantadi*

Together all these works come to about four thousand stanzas. In poems that do not have stanzaic form, lines or groups of lines are counted as stanzas. All these poems except the

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portion known as *Iyarpa* were composed to be sung or were later set to music. The musical score that might give an idea of how they were originally sung is not available. Many of them are sung in various ways today. All of them, however, are chanted once a year during the *Adhyayana Utsava*[1] in South Indian Vaishnava shrines.

These hymns represent the high-water mark of the Hindu religious revival that swept over the Tamil Nadu during the days of the Pallavas of Kanchi. That revival which saw a unique inter-play of Sanskrit and Tamil, found its final and most intense vocal expression in matchless poetry through the Vaishnava Alwars and Saiva Nayanmars.

All the Alwars except Madhurakavi sing of God. Madhurakavi's *Kanninum Chirutambu,* a piece of eleven four-lined stanzas and the only work attributed to him, is a poem on his *acharya,* Nammalwar. 'The name of the great one, my *acharya* of Kurukoor[2] here uttered, brings nectar to my tongue and is far sweeter than the name of the Lord, He who willed that He should be tied with a small knotted rope'[3]. Thus speaks Madhurakavi in an ecstasy of gratitude to Nammalwar and becomes the model for later Vaishnavas, one of whose tenets, as indeed of other schools of thought, is that without the love of the *acharya* and his guidance, salvation is unattainable.

To the Alwars, God is not an idea but a presence. They make it clear, however, as Nammalwar does in the following lines, that God is everywhere, transcends all that the religions postulate, is not to be comprehended or expressed by the senses and the mind and is realised only through the consciousness.

He is everything
He is everyone

---

1. Festival of twenty days during which all the works of the Alwars are recited in Vishnu temples.

2. Kurukoor, now known as Alwartirunagari, is a village in the Tirunelveli Dist., Tamil Nadu. It was her under a tamarind tree that Nammalwar spent most of his life.

3. *Kanninunchirutambu.* The reference is to an incident in Krishna Avatara when the Lord as the child Krishan was bound with a rope by his foster-mother, Yasoda.

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He is and is not
In the religions they have
He does not admit of being spoken
By the five senses
He is known by one's consciousness
He takes from there[1]

The specific contribution that the Alwars made was to substitute experience for speculation. That experience was *bhakti* or love of God and its ultimate reach was fulfilment through surrender. The light that the work of the Alwars threw illumined the way of Sri Ramanuja when he undertook his commentary on the *Brahma Sutras* and he included in the system he founded, *Saranagati,* the doctrine of surrender.

The works of the Alwars are primarily poems, naturally, mystical and religious in content, nevertheless poems. They are not to be considered as systematised philosophy or theology. Philosophical and theological utterances occur in them, which is inevitable. But the purpose of the Alwars, judged by their work, does not seem to be to evolve any rigid system of thought or to postulate a theological code as Sri Sankara or Sri Ramanuja did. Vaishnava theologians of a later time, well-versed in Sanskrit and in Ramanuja's interpretation of the *Brahma Sutras,* have made elaborate attempts through *Manipravala*[2] commentaries to link line with line, stanza with stanza, decade with decade, specially with Nammalwar's *Tiruvaimozhi* and evolve a continuous and logical stream of theological thought. These commentaries are a marvel of learning, vedic and non-vedic, and are unrivalled for subtlety and precision. Their authority is such that today no one would venture to question it. But one cannot help feeling that the effort of these commentators, massive, scholarly, searching, meticulous and in places, marvellously illuminating, is still the work of the theologian who tries ever to bring into his frame of reference an experience that is beyond expression and that by some miracle has been embodied in words of exceptional power.

1. *Tiruvaimozhi* : 3-4-10.
2. A mixture of Sanskrit and Tamil.

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These works record every stage of the journey towards reality. The journey begins, as it generally does, with a restlessness of the spirit that tests and rejects the here and now. Thus Nammalwar :

Along the path of this contraption,
The body that Thou gavest me
I whirl,
When will the disease
Of this burning time die ?
When will I uproot *Karma* ?
When, when will I become
One with Thee ?

I cry and cry
From within the thicket of this earth
Sinner that I am,
I wander bewildered in an endless maze.
Where, where can I reach Him ?[2]

From every one of the Alwars except Tiruppan this cry breaks forth. They admit that the senses are hard to be tamed. They coax the mind, they chide it, they try to wean it from the earth. 'Think of Him, my heart' says Poigai Alwar. 'Only think of Him. You may praise Him, you may blame Him, you may speak of Him, as low as you please, only think of Him.' Kulasekhara, who was a king, sings :

No, no, I do not care for any of these :
To be the ruler of untold wealth,
Of the wide earth,
To ride on the swaying elephant strong
To taste kingship,
To revel in the songs and dances
Of Urvasi and Menaka,
Of women bright and slender as the lightning,—
No, no, I care not for any of these.[3]

1. *Tiruvaimozhi* : 3-2-1.
2. *Tiruvaimozhi* : 3-2-9.
3. *Perumal Tirumozhi* : 4-2, 5, 6.

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Tirumangai cries :

I cannot bear
The never-ending gnawing of the senses,
They are eating away my spirit
Worming into it, little by little,
And I am afraid, Lord, I am afraid,
And turn to Thee.[1]

The conquest of the senses is the first step. The Alwars achieve this, not by starving them but by changing their direction. They know of the ascetic path, they speak of it but their way is that of which Tiruvalluvar spoke :

Attach yourself to the feet
Of Him who is void of all attachment
That is the way to shed yours.[2]

In this, they are theistic, rather than *advaitic.*

This attachment to God by which the Alwars try to turn the body and the mind from the earth is not the mere intellectual perception of an idea in the abstract. The Srivaishnava concept of God as *saguna* gave the Alwars any number of concrete images and events as instruments of expression. One section of modern Hindu thought, under the influence of the luminous abstract speculation of the *Upanishads,* tries to explain them as mere symbols. But to the Alwars they were not mere symbols, they were the embodiment of Reality, the only way that the Infinite could reach out to a conditioned world. The belief in *avatara* (the descent of God to this earth) as a voluntary expression of His grace placed in the hands of the Alwars, the wealth of the concrete into which, according to the *Ramayana,* the *Bhagavata* and the *Vishnu Purana,* the Transcendent had revealed itself in the conditioned, and through which the Eternal had shone through the mists of time. Again, the Alwars believed that the various shrines dedicated to God were really abodes in which God dwelt, not merely as indwelling and directing spirit, as *antaryamin and niyanta,* but also as the visible idol,

1. *Periya Tirumozhi* : 7-7-1.
2. *Tirukkural* : 350.

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worshipped there, what theology calls the *archavatara*. Besides, the whole wide world of earth and sky, all cosmos, was to the Alwars the body, the *virat svarupa,* of God. This wealth of the concrete, then, the accounts of the *avataras,* the glowing idols felt to be God, the shrines that were considered as segments of the Infinite, and all cosmos—was rich enough to satisfy the mind and the senses and to draw them away from earthiness. The earth was not rejected by the Alwars, it was transformed. The senses and the mind were not uprooted but were planted firmly in the shining fields of the concrete and the phenomenal which is their natural home, and nurtured Godward, thereby making them, instead of being impediments, instruments of spiritual progress. I referred earlier to how Tiruppan is the one Alwar who does not cry against the senses. He has no need to. In the only poem he wrote, *Amalanadippiran,* he speaks of the beauty of the Lord of Srirangam and how that beauty has drawn and satisfied his mind and all his senses to the exclusion of everything else:

> 'His dark body has filled my mind,
> unbearably sweet'[1].

Tirumangai, in whose *Periya Tirumozhi* we often come across the bitter complaint against the senses and the material attachment to which they lead, nevertheless affirms that there is no necessity to suppress them. An ascetic negation of the body is not for him.

> 'No penance for you my friends' he says,
> 'No penance, friends,
> For you who wish to claim as your own
> The world eternal.
> No mortifying of the flesh,
> No placing of life under duress.
> No torturing of the five senses
> That, for all that you can do,
> Cleave to the body, not to be shaken off.
> No more wasting and withering for you,

1. *Amalanadippiran* : 9.

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Instead, your way lies there
Where the forest dances,
And the peacocks,
And nearby, dances the brook,
And the bright fish within it.
There across the fields, goes your way
Where lies Chitrakuta,
Mount of Beauty,
Flags dancing honey-sweet over the terraces'[1].

Not to crush but to yoke the instrument of the body to seek the real is the endeavour. It may seem to be more natural and therefore easier than the ascetic way of repression. But every mystic knows that it has its own dangers, chiefly the one of deluding oneself that to be merely sensuous is to be sensitive to the infinite reaches of the spirit, and the other one of pantheistic thought deteriorating into pancosmism. Again and again, the Alwars declare that for all the interpenetration of the earth and God, God is transcendental, *Seshi, Niyamaka.* Says Nammalwar :

He is here,
And all these forms are His.
He is also not of the here;
And so, all these forms
Are shadows of the Formless.
God is of the here and not of the here.
These are his twin attributes.
But He is, here and beyond, endless. He is'.

This is easy enough to postulate but the spirit is sorely tried in realising it. Of a sudden, however, the hand of God bridges the gulf between the infinite and finite and the spirit of man tastes freedom and realisation. It now looks around on this earth, this bank and shoal of time, as Nammalwar did, and finds it woven of the eternal. The wave becomes conscious that it is a segment of the Infinite sea, it is a wave

1. *Periya Tirumozhi* : 3-2-1.
2. *Tiruvaimozhi* : 1-1-9.

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and yet the sea. 'O, joy, O, joy', sings Nammalwar speaking of this moment :

Blessed, blessed is the world
The dark curse laid on life is lifted.
Wasting has been laid waste,
And hell is in ruins.
Worn-out Death has nothing he can call his here.
Behold, the dark ages are dead.
For everywhere on the earth,
Myriads of Gold's servitors
Are singing and dancing
Dancing and singing His praise ![1]

The earth and everything in it have now become the resplendent hem of God's garment.

Tirumazhisai Alwar says the same thing differently :

I have found, I have found Him,
The theme perfect for my poem.
The Vedas, if you examine them,
Speak but of the same.[2]

Poigai Alwar sings :

The sky and the fire,
The rolling sea and the air,
They are now Thee
And are honey and milk to me.[3]

It is of this sudden glimpse that the spirit has had of the Ultimate that Andal sings, Andal, daughter of the earth who became the Bride of the Lord. She sings of it as a dream she has had and the wedding is the symbol used :

It was a long, long procession;
A thousand elephants led it.
At the centre, He walked . . .
Into the hall decked with palms
He came, Madhava...
Standing beneath a canopy of pearls,

1. *Tiruvaimozhi* : 5–2–1.
2. *Nanmukan Tiruvantadi* : 69.
3. *Mutal Tiruvantai* : 92.

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He took hold of me by the hand.
And with my hand in His,
He walked round the sacred fire with me,
He made me His.[1]

This is part of Andal's dream; and it is but a dream to her because the mystical vision has been but a momentary experience, vivid, no doubt, and real, but fugitive. The splendour that filled the heart and the earth fades as suddenly as it came. The quest begins again, but now it is more passionate, it is fiercer, for, reality has been apprehended once and the human soul yearns to make it a permanent possession, that is to say, to become possessed by it.

The lyrics of the Alwars express all the ardour and agony of this stage of mystical life. It is here that they employ different kinds of human relationships—*bhavas* as they are called—as so many golden ways of the heart to God. In this, they are in accord with mystics all the world over. In a great mystical poem, we note two things: The first is the intensity with which the human passion used as a symbol is presented; the intensity is so great and compelling that by its own volition it carries us, though it starts from the earth, to the beyond. The second is and this is essential—the mystical poet never forgets the divine of which the earthly state is only a symbol; if he does, then, to that extent, the poem falls short of being an authentic mystical utterance. In other words, the symbol glows—has to glow throughout—with a light that never was on sea or land. On the one hand, to express the earthly passion intensely (otherwise the poem becomes an artificial theological allegory, a discussion, not a communication) and on the other, to maintain the symbol as a symbol, otherwise the poem is just another poem of the earth, to move at the same time in these mutually opposed directions in order to express the inexpressible—this is the mystic's problem. It is true that a true mystic never thinks of it as a problem, never thinks of it objectively at all. He is so wrapped in his passion for

1. *Nachiar Tirumozhi : 6*

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God that the mould into which he pours it, fills and overflows and though the mould is fashioned out of the earth, it gets transformed into something divine by the very excess of the passion. We can see this in the work of the Alwars. But what specially distinguishes it is that, to the Alwars, the symbols from the earth are already shot with the light of God. To them, God has already come to this earth many times and in each one of the *avataras,* has been the protagonist in a number of human relationships. The *avataras* provide the Alwars with the symbols which are at once of the earth and heaven. Thus, Periyalwar conceives of God as a child and his lyrics are mostly in *vatsalya-bhava,* that is, the love of a mother for her child. But the child to whom Periyalwar turns as to God is not a symbol fashioned by him out of the stuff of human affection, not a mere figure of speech imagined by him. He does not merely try to see God as a child; to him God is child; for has not He come to the earth as Krishna, played on the hallowed banks of the Jamuna and in the sacred groves of Vrindavan ? What Periyalwar does is to identify himself with Yasoda, Krishna's foster-mother, and once that is done, the symbol of the child becomes a living thing; and Periyalwar finds in the thousand and one details recorded of Krishna in the *Bhagavata* the various stops on which his own yearning for God can play the endless tune of seeking and finding. Periyalwar's lyrics thus have all the convincing intensity of the realistic and all the mystical quality of the real.

Another Alwar, Kulasekhara, by identifying himself with Devaki, the mother of Lord Krishna, is able to give poignant expression to the sense of desolation that comes over the seeker when what he seeks appears for a moment and vanishes. Lord Krishna, the *Bhagavata* says, became Devaki's child but the same night,—He has so ordained it—He is taken to Nanda Gokula and brought up by Yasoda. Kulasekhara utters as Devaki the same cry that breaks out from every mystic at one stage of his God-ward journey :

Whither has it fled, the visionary gleam,

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Where is it now, the glory and the dream ?

Periyalwar, speaking as Hanuman, expresses the *dasya-bhava*, that is, the seeker approaching God as his master. Kulasekhara, who was himself a king, speaks of God as king; he has, however, no need to evolve this symbol, for God to him is already Sri Rama, King of Ayodhya. There are in the works of the Alwars a number of exquisite lyrics in the *madhura-bhava* or the *nayika-nayaka-bhava*, that is to say, lyrics that illustrate the path of bridal mysticism. Here is one from Nammalwar :

The village is asleep
And all the world is steeped in the dark midnight.
All time has gathered
Into this long, long night.
If he does not come,
Who is there who can save me ?
O heart, my foolish heart,
Why did you love Him, why?
Will the red sun never come
Riding in the chariot of the east?
Will this night never die
But go on and on, dying like me,
Little by little,
Particle by particle?
The world is asleep, indifferent, cold :
But I am awake.
O heart, my foolish heart,
Why did you love Him, why ?[1]

Here is another from the same mystic :

The south wind fragrant with jasmine stabs me.
The rich *kurinjippan*[2] comes on the evening.
The twilight makes me reel drunk,
And the clouds aflame in the sunset
Tear me to pieces.
He, the Lord of mystery,

1. *Tiruvaimozhi* : 5-4-1, 10.
2. A melody.

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Are his eyes like the blue lily, are they the lotus?
He has kissed these shoulders, these breasts;
And I know not
Where to turn for refuge.[1]

x x x x

I am the flower
That the Divine Bee has sucked and torn.
But that does not save my spirit now,
Far from it.
Even my heart, is no help to me;
And I know not
Where to turn for refuge.[2]

It will be noted that the lover here, who is the symbol of God, is God himself as Krishna, Lord of the cowherds, and the lover of Gopis.

But the most moving and the most intense lyrics in the *nayika-nayaka-bhava* are from Andal. The great Tamil Vaishnava commentator, Periyavachan Pillai speaks of her bridal mysticism as being as natural as waters flowing downward. In her work, the dual symbolism of the earth on the one hand and the *avatara* events on the other, that we find among the works of Alwars, rise to great heights of expression and suggestion. She falls in love with God but she has no need to symbolise him as a lover. He is already that; He is Lord Krishna, the lover of Vrindavan, calling to the infatuated Gopis with his flute; and He is the Eternal Lover, calling human hearts to him from the gold bar of Heaven, which to the Alwars, is everywhere. In Andal's *Tiruppavai,* Tamil Nadu, that is the earth around her, becomes transfigured into Nanda Gokula and that again dissolves through the magic of the significant symbols that are themselves reality, into the bourne beyond space and time, where the individual merges in the one Truth.

There is one aspect of what I call this dual symbolism—though to the Alwars, it was not symbolism at all—that deserves

1- *Tiruvaimozhi* : 9-9-4.
2. *Tiruvaimozhi* : 9-9-4.

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notice. Where an Alwar is defining his relationship to God in terms of one *avatara,* he makes references to other *avataras* too or other incidents in the same *avatara,* as a contrast, thereby throwing into relief what he is recording. Thus, in *Tiruppavai* Andal is speaking of the nearness of God through presenting how Krishna came out of his chamber and appeared before the Gopis ; that is, she is using details from Krishna *avatara.* The wonder that the human soul feels at this nearness to God, at the immeasurable Grace that has descended to lift up such a small thing as itself, is brought out by Andal through reference to other *avataras.* The Gopis speak, as they stand marvelling at the beauty of Krishna's feet as he walks before them :

Blessed be Thou
Who measured of yore this earth with Thy feet.
Blessed be Thou
Who went all the way on foot
To Lanka to destroy it.

Here, the references are to *Trivikrama avatara* and *Rama* delay in realising God ; to put it in the symbolic way of the *Krishna avatara.* 'The feet that measured all earth, the warrior feet that walked the long, long way to Lanka are now moving before us as those of an ordinary mortal.' So think the Gopis and the wonder that they feel stands revealed.

In another poem, Andal is expressing her frustration at the delay in realising God; to put it in the symbolic way of the *madhura bhava,* at the lover not having kept his word and tryst. The lover is God ; to Andal he is Lord Krishna. But, she makes a sudden reference to *Varaha avatara* and this reference flames into intense and daring expression of bitter complaint and frustration. 'You have not come', she says to the Divine Lover, 'and that is to be expected. For, were you not once a pig, a shameless, dirty unwashed pig, all for love of the dirt-covered woman, the earth?'[1] The utter daring of mysticising, as an instrument, that which is chronicled in the story

1. *Nachiar Tirumozhi* : 9-8.

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of an *avatara,* to express of disappointment, and poignancy, that is what we see here. Francis Thompson likened God to a hound; Andal spoke of God as a pig; but while Thompson evolved his own symbol, Andal only used what was already part of the Vishnu epoch.

Thus, the symbols that the Alwars use from out of the earth are the earth relationships that God as *avatara* actually had here and so, in their work, the symbol and the think symbolised become fused into one. The vagueness and artificiality that symbolism sometimes brings in its train are thus avoided; and the passion of the moth for the moth gains in intensity, even as it glides easily and convincingly into the passion of the moth for the star.

A passage from one of the mystical love poems of Nammalwar illustrates another feature of the symbolism of the Alwars. Here is the passage :

Evening has come, He has not.
And the kine are wriggling in content,
For the bulls, bells jingling,
Have mated with them.
The cruel flutes are prating.
Within the bright, bright jasmine buds,
And the blue lily,
The bee is fluttering and dancing.
The sea breaks open, leaping up to the sky
and cries and cries.
What is it that I can say?
How can I escape and save myself,
Here without Him?[1]

The details chosen by the poet from the evening landscape are significant. The suggestion is clear and cannot be missed; it is almost openly revealed by the context. The kine and the flowers and the sea are experiencing either the ecstasy of love's commingling or the wordless peace and fulfilment that comes the moment after. Their presence heightens the agony of

1. *Tiruvaimozhi* : 9-9-10.

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longing in the heart of the love-lorn soul, an agony that knows no respite, from which there is no escape.

In the love poems of the *Sangam* age,[1] the age preceding, that of the Alwars, we find this kind of suggestion through nature description consistently and consciously employed.[2]

This is not to be confused with pathetic fallacy. It is a different poetic instrument and through it, the *Sangam* poets weave, by implied similarity and contrast, rich and delicate overtones to the cry that is the poem. In the works of the Alwars, this poetic tradition persists. The description appears at first sight to be just that and nothing more. But dwell on it, and then it unfolds into a hint that opens depths unsuspected in the poem. Thus, Tirumangai describes Tiruvahindrapuram where there is a shrine, in the following words :

> The she-bee goes into the flashing webs of
> the *madhavi* creeper ;
> And in the fragrance-unfolding lotus,
> Her mate calls sweet and loud;
> This is Tiruvahindrapuram.[3]

Though the she-bee has come away from her mate in a huff exchanging the lotus for the *madhavi* creeper, the male-bee keeps calling to her. The suggestion is that even so, God keeps calling to His Divine Consort. This, the commentators say, is the suggestion. We may say that the lines suggest that God keeps calling to the errant soul. Similar suggestions are to be found in all the nature-descriptions of the Alwars. These have been tracked and their effect on mystical expression elaborated by the great *Manipravala* commentators.

The symbolism found in the works of the Alwars then has two distinct features. One is the result of the belief in *avataras* and in *archavatara* and also in the world being God's *viratasvarupa*.

1. The earliest period of Tamil literature.

2 Tolkappiar, the great Tamil grammarian and rhetorician, refers to this in his *Porul Adikaram*; and Nachinarkiniar, the great commentator, commenting on this *sutra says* : The suggestion called '*Iraichi* springs no doubt from the details of nature.
But it helps the theme or mood of the poem.

3. *Periya Tirumozhi* : 3-1-2.

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This makes the symbols parts of the reality that they seek to express and also places in the hands of the Alwars a wealth of story and incidents and human relationships in which God has directly and visibly played a part. So it is that the symbols glow as segments of Truth. The other feature is their using the *Sangam* technique of oblique suggestion, suspending in a realistic description, as light in a mist, a world of wordless feeling and experience. This makes their symbols rich and subtle, with a power all their own, of reaching out to level on level of complex mystical experience.

The works of the Alwars are a rich poetical record, intense and personal, of what Leibniz called *Philosophia Perennis*, 'the metaphysic that recognises a divine reality substantial to the world of things and lives and minds, the psychology that finds in the soul something similar to, or even identical with divine reality, the ethic that places man's final end in the knowledge of the Immanent and transcendent ground of all being.[1] Says Tirumazhisai Alwar :

> I am nothing without Thee, Lord,
> And Thou, Thou too art not without me.[2]

It is of this interpenetration of heaven and earth, of God and man that all the Alwars speak, not as an idea forged by the intellect but as an experience lived in the deepest reaches of the human spirit.

1. Aldous Huxley : *The Perennial Philosophy.*
2. *Nammukan Tiruvantaai* : 7.

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ANDAL

Prema Nandakumar

In the long inspiring history of Tamil literature, the period between 6th and 8th centuries glows with the ecstasies of devotional poetry. During the 6th century, there erupted in South India a widespread *bhakti* movement. Within a century the movement had reached the heights of poetic and religious fervour, thanks to a galaxy of inspired singers. These devotional poets were either Vaishnavites or Saivites. The former group was spearheaded by the three saints, Pogai Alwar, Bhutattalwar and Pey Alwar. Of the later Alwars, Vishnuchitta known as Periya Alwar was born in Srivilliputtur in Tirunelveli District. He was pious, learned and unassuming. Called upon once to face a religious controversy conducted by the Pandyan King, he emerged victorious. Thereupon the King honoured him in several ways, placed him on an elephant, and took him in procession through the main streets of his capital. According to tradition, the Lord was pleased with his devotee and appeared to him seated on His mount, the Sacred Eagle, *Garuda*. Overjoyed, yet anxious for the safety of the Lord who was seemingly precariously perched on the Divine Bird, Vishnuchitta sang a benediction for the long life of the Lord ! For his benedictory song, *Tirupallandu,* the devotee was inspired by the rhythm of time kept by the jingling bells of his caparisoned elephant. Vishnuchitta was famous, but he preferred the quiet of his home town and the pleasures of his garden wherein he grew a variety of flowers for making garlands to the deity in Srivilliputtur temple. He lavished particular attention on a bed of sacred basil, *Tulasi,* the favourite leaf-adornment of Vishnu. Into this idyllic life came an excitement of great potency. One day when, in the course of his morning exertions, Vishnuchitta came to the bed of sacred basil, he found a female child sleeping

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blissfully. He felt that the child was the Lord's gift and took her home, named her Goda, and lavished all his affection upon the beautiful child. She was also called Naachiyar and Andal. Modern scholars place Andal's life about the middle of ninth century.

Andal grew up at a time when the *bhakti* movement was in its noon-day glory. The first group of Alwars had sung of the Lord in manifold ways, and the general public fondly repeated these songs as though they were the Tamil version of the Sanskrit Vedas, for the songs were musical, literary and, above all, embedded with the wisdom of the ages. To Andal and her companions, singing the *pasurams* must have been a favourite pastime. Andal, in Vishnuchitta's home, grew up in silent and reverential admiration of the Lord as Krishna. Since Vishnuchitta's favourite godhead was the Krishna-avatara, Andal too was overwhelmed by unspecified visions of Krishna. His life-history depicted in the Puranas became familiar to her. And soon, like her predecessors in epic and legend—Rukmini and Radha and Satyabhama—Andal too fell in love with the divine-human Krishna. Attaining him in a bridal ceremony became her goal. She was constantly thinking of Him and speaking of Him and singing of Him. She had a particular interest in the garlands her father daily wove for Krishna in the temple. Assailed often by doubts about her own beauty—whether she was a fit bride to the most beautiful of the world, the *Bhuvana Sundara,* or not,—she would take the garlands, wear them, and survey her figure in the looking-glass.

Vishnuchitta was a loving father. He taught his girl all the rich religious lore of our land and felt immensely happy to see her grow into an intelligent and lovely maid. To his horror, he found one day a stray curl of hair in his fresh garland which he was taking to the temple. Soon he came to know of the strange preoccupation of his daughter. He berated her, and she refrained from donning the garlands henceforth. Yet Vishnuchitta felt that his Lord in the temple did not look as benign as before. What could be the reason? he asked himself. He was answered by

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the Lord who appeared in the devotee's dream and told him how he had preferred the garlands first worn by Andal ; it was such garlands that gave Him that divine lustre ! Vishnuchitta bowed to the Divine Will, and henceforth allowed Andal to wear the garlands before taking them to the temple.

The religious atmosphere in the air, the simple nobility of her own house and the sign of the Lord's acceptance of her love—these turned Andal Godward with peculiar intensity. While asleep she dreamt of Krishna,—He appeared to her as a bedecked bridegroom. Her waking hours were filled with visions of Krishna's life and her sensibilities were continually assailed by the pain of her ecstatic love. Her frenzies were more frequent as she grew in years, and she underwent all the traditional passages of a mystic's life, including the 'dark night of the soul'. To the fond father, these pangs of Andal were painful. Nor did he know the way to alleviate them. She was hankering after a divine union; and being a mortal, she gave expression to her longings as a human being would. Vishnuchitta misunderstood the signs. He asked her to indicate the chosen person, and he would gladly celebrate the wedding. But Andal would have none of the human bondage. Her chosen bridegroom was the Lord Himself. She would wed only Ranganatha, the presiding deity of Srirangam. The mentally harried father knew no way out. How was this possible ? Would the Lord Himself come and seek the hand of a mere human being ? But Andal insisted that her vow or *pavai nonbu* was not undertaken light-heartedly. And the Lord had come into that decorated wedding pandal. In a moment of bridal mystic trance she sang :

The drums beat
The conch blew
'Neath the pearl-decked
Wedding place;
Madhusudan, my Lord,
The hope of all,
He came; and I dreamt
That he held my hand.

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Had Vishnuchitta, by his overzealous religious instruction, maddened this innocent child? Vishnuchitta grew restless. At last, the Lord came in his dream too and assured him that He would indeed marry Andal. Vishnuchitta was to bring her with due ceremony to the Srirangam temple on an auspicious day. The priests of Srirangam temple were also asked to do honour to the devotees from Srivilliputtur. Andal came to the temple, entered the inner shrine and was conquered by the sheer beauty of her Divine Love. She merged with Him in a flash. An aerial voice assured the desolate father that Andal was indeed happily married now; Vishnuchitta should go back to Srivilliputtur, instal the image of Andal and Ranganatha, and have a temple built for them. By coming into his life, and spending these few years in his home, Goda had ruled Vishnuchitta's heart with love—and hence she is known as Andal to posterity.

Among the works of the Alwars, Andal's songs have a special niche of their own. She is the solitary woman-poet of them all, and if the other Alwars are rich in wisdom and ripe in experience, Andal's poems win by their sheer simplicity and melodic beauty. Again, like many mystics of the East and West, the Alwars too approached God as a divine lover of the celestial bridegroom. Whereas the other Alwars had to imaginatively identify themselves with a feminine role, Andal could enact the *nayaka-nayaki-bhava* naturally. The works of Andal that have come down to us are *Tirumozhi* and *Tiruppavai*. *Tirumozhi* consists of 153 verses. They detail various phases of spiritual love as experienced by the poetess. She is clear about her goal, which is the Lord Himself, and Andal had told her father that she would not care to live if he thought of giving her in marriage to a mortal. Vishnuchitta too had wisely refrained from going against her wishes. In the many verses of *Tirumozhi*, Andal reiterates her desire to love only Tirumal (Vishnu). She goes through the vicissitudes of desire, the 'existential shock' of meeting Him in person, separation from one's beloved, the despair or rejection, and the tribulations of living in a human society with its attendant gossip. Many of the verses describe her long vigil

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—spelt out in terms of despair and hope.

Light, colour, thought, sleep—
These have left me—O ye clouds !
I shall sing Govinda's praises
And ask my soul to wait,
I rest with the golden garlands
In the garden of Tirumal,
Waiting : when will I hear
The sound of the Lord's conch
And the twang of Saranga bow ?

She is indeed a God-intoxicated damsel in distress. She must somehow get in touch with her Lord and recapture the lost moment of mystic union, and make it permanent !

That Pure One with the White Conch,
He shows me not Himself ;
Entering my heart
He tortures me every day ;
He who has become my being ;
Sing aloud, : do not merely whisper
O kuyil ![1] Blaze forth thy voice
For the coming of my Lord !

The Lord has agreed to take her, but her father has to make the arrangements for the union. How could Vishnuchitta part with the loving child in such an unearthly way ? Temporarily blind to the spiritual forces around him, he is stalling for time. Uneasy grows Andal and sends word to him through a friend :

My good friend ! The Lord resting on the Snake
Is rich and noble ; myself lowly. What can I do ?
My desire can be fulfilled only
If Vishnuchitta brings the Lord to me.
Vishnuchitta must have heard
The orders of my Lord of Srirangam.
'He who is loved loves his beloved'—
Where, then, the hope,
Should the saying prove false ?

1 Cuckoo.

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In a poem of eleven verses Andal describes a 'dream' where each phase of her wedding to the Lord is embroidered with rich imagery. It is as though we are witnessing a series of colour-slides, and it is no wonder that *Vaaranamayiram* is popular in South India and is sung at the time of weddings to this day. It is the very acme of spiritual love, romanticised for the purposes of realistic poesy. The attendant activities of a Hindu wedding are highlighted by the entry of the Lord into the wedding pandal :

As young dancers lithe
Welcomed with glittering lamps
The King of Mathura entered.
My friend ! The very pandal moved.

Even as the priests intone the sacred verses, Andal and the Lord go round the symbol Fire ; He places her feet on the auspicious stone; and they ride a caparisoned elephant and go round the town in ceremonial procession. Albeit the recounting of a dream for the friend who is listening, to Andal herself the poem is the living experience of a mystic vision in which she had found herself united with the Lord.

The other work of Andal, *Tiruppavai* is a unique document. This consists of thirty stanzas each of eight lines dramatising a group of maidens going from house to house and bidding their friends to rise and join them for an early morning bath. This had been the custom in the Tamil land for centuries,—the tribal belles would take an early morning bath in the coldest month of the year and pray to the Lord for giving them good husbands. In one of the early Tamil anthologies, *Paripadal*, an identical ceremony is described. Young girls take a purificatory bath in the river Vaigai in the month of *Thai* and pray for the various marital blessings. Whereas the quest is for spiritual love in Andal's poem, in *Paripadal* the pre-occupation is with things sensual :

'O water of Vaigai ! You are crystalline,
Hence I bathe in you' say some girls ;
'May my beloved embrace me
With arms entwined', pray a few ;

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'My loving consort shouldn't leave me
Like the bee that rejects the used-up flower.
Let not old age mar our youth's bliss.
May we have prosperity and relatives,
Pray some other maidens.

No doubt, the framework of the ceremony described in the ancient *Paripadal* was also used by Andal to describe her soul's yearnings, and besides, in the life of Krishna, such a ceremony has an important place. Once when Krishna had created a drought in the Yadava country because the elderly Yadavas had frowned upon his romantic adventures, the maidens decided to enact this ceremony and pray for rain. Accordingly, in the month of *Margasira* they got up in the early hours of the morning and took their bath in the river Yamuna followed by prayers. Krishna immediately rewarded them with His abundant Grace, and prosperity returned to the country. Andal was immersed in Krishna's life from her very childhood. She imagined that she was a *gopi* back in the days of Krishna. Vishnuchitta's house became the Yadava land. The Lord in Srivilliputtur temple was Krishna in person. And Andal lived through the ancient ceremony imaginatively and recorded her inner life in the songs of *Tiruppavai*. The language is extremely supple and musical, the imagery redolent of the time lost in the rush of ages. Krishna's many exploits —from childhood to the Mahabharata war—are recaptured in beautiful verse. It is a long poem invoking the grace of the Lord with an aspiration in each stanza for ejecting the *tamas* of worldly existence and awaking in a land of spiritual glory presided over by Krishna :

Auspicious with a lustrous moon
Dawns the month of *Margazhi*.
And so, hurry up, you bejewelled girls,
Bright youngsters of wealthy *Ayarpadi*,[1]
Those of you who desire an early morning bath.
For, the son of sharp-eyed Nandagopa,
The lion-cub child of pretty-eyed Yasoda

1 Hornlet of the Cowherds.

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Incarnation of Lord Narayana
Will be granting us the season's boons
Worthy of the world's approbation.[1]

So begins *Tiruppavai.* Firstly the girls are awakened with a burst of cajolery satire and anger. Then all the girls go to the Lord to wake Him up from his divine sleep. Andal repeatedly *causes* an 'existential shock' with her direct, appropriate similes :

The valiant lion snugly asleep
In its mountain cave during rain
Wakes up, eyes aflame,
Bristles its hair in all directions,
Stretches its limbs, stands erect,
And sets out roaring.
Even so you, though flower-like,
Leave your bed, march into the hall,
And taking your lion-seated throne
Our grievances enquire and deal mercy.[1]

Andal speaks as though the Lord is in her front; as if she were conversing with him as a lover and as a friend. The association is absolutely realistic. Like Arjuna, Andal too feels that this close intimacy has its drawbacks as well. For, in the self-forgetfulness engendered by such closeness, she might have overstepped the limits of her rights. After all she is a mortal, and He is a divine being. Andal seeks His forgiveness when still in her imaginative trance :

We follow our cows to the woods
And take our dinner there.
Though born of an illiterate shepherd community
We had the good fortune to have you with us.
Govinda ! Perfection incarnate !
Our relationship will never snap.
May be, often out of ignorance and affection
We have called you by familiar names.
Take them not to your heart, my Lord,
But bless us with thy boons.[1]

1. The translations are by the writer's uncle, Shri R. Bangaruswami.

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That the 'boons' asked for by Andal are neither sensuous ones as in *Paripadal* nor worldly prosperity as in the *Bhagavatam* is made clear by the poetess in yet another verse :

Here then is the meaning and purpose
Of our early morning approach to you
For worshipping at thy golden lotus feet.
Though we belong to a clan of cattle-grazers
Never must you discard our services as mean.
Not for today's worship only have we come to you,
Govinda,
But always—for seven generations to come—for ever—
Will we feel related to you, will be at your beck and call.
Let all our other desires be annihilated.[1]

Andal transcended the boundaries of human vanities by annihilating vain desires. She entered—almost glided into—the world of the Spirit. For projecting the perfection of *nayaka-nayaki bhava* in her mystic poetry, for her inspiring spiritual quest and for the determined realisation of her goal, Andal remains a great and unique figure in the whole range of Tamil poetry and holds a sovereign place in the hearts of millions of devotees to this day.

1 The translations are by the writer's uncle, Sri R. Bangaruswami.

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JNANESHWAR

B. P. Bahirat

Jnaneshwar was the famous saint that Maharashtra produced in the 13th century A.D. He was a great genius in whom we find a rare combination of philosophy, poetry and profound religious experience. He was a great devotee (*Bhakta*), a great *Jnani* and a great *Yogi*. He was the source of inspiration to his contemporary saints Namadeva, Chokhamela and others as well as to later saints Ekanath and Tukaram. He laid the philosophical foundation of the *Bhakti* cult in Maharashtra, upheld the *Varkari* tradition and the worship of the deity Shri Vitthal of Pandharpur who is the symbol of universal love. His heart yearned for the moral and spiritual uplift of mankind. He regarded the whole world as one family and advised people to cultivate the spirit of friendliness, serving one God—the God of love who is the father and mother of all beings. He taught that to do one's duty properly is the true way of worshipping Him. He thus became the apostle of *Bhagavatadharma* in Maharashtra. He is called *Jnanoba Mauli*, the mother of devotees.

The oldest reliable biography of Jnaneshwar is written by his contemporary saint Namadeva. According to him Jnaneshwar's ancestors lived at Apegaon, on the bank of Godavari, 13 km from Paithan, the then famous seat of Sanskrit learning in the Deccan. Jnaneshwar's grandfather, Govindpant, and grandmother, Nirai, were disciples of Gorakhnath. This pious couple got a son and named him Vitthal after their dear deity of Pandharpur.

Vi halpant had a deep religious bent of mind from his boyhood. He studied sacred Sanskrit scriptures and with the permission of his parents went on a pilgrimage. He happened to visit Alandi, situated on the bank of Indrayani, 21 km from

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the present Poona city, and had *darshan* of Siddheshwar. Siddhopant, the *kulkarni* of Alandi gave his daughter Rukmini in marriage to Vitthalpant. The married couple went to Apegaon and lived happily for some years gladdening the hearts of their parents. After the death of his parents, both of them went to stay at Alandi.

Gradually Vitthalpant's heart became restless. He yearned for self-realisation. One day he left his wife, went to Varanasi and got himself initiated as a *sannyasi* by one Sripadswami who named him Chaitanya. After this incident Sripadswami left Varanasi for pilgrimage and on his way visited Alandi. There Vitthalpant's wife Rukmini was circumbulating a sacred *Aswattha* tree. When she saw Sripadswami she bowed down to his feet. Swami gave her his blessings saying : "Let pious sons be born to you". But to his dismay Swami found on the face of Rukmini only the sign of ironical smile that concealed her heart's anguish. When he knew the cause of her grief he was reminded of his new disciple and wondered whether he was the same person for whom Rukmini was pining. He returned to Varanasi. After inquiry he was convinced that Chaitanya was no other than Vitthalpant. He ordered him to give up *sannyas,* to go back to Alandi and lead a householder's life with his wife. He gave his blessings saying "Fear not, God will always help you." So Vitthalpant returned home and led the life of a householder.

Orthodox Brahmins of Alandi excommunicated him and he was greatly harassed for having given up *sannyas.* Twelve years passed and Rukmini gave birth to three sons and a daughter. Nivrittinath was born in Saka 1195, Jnaneshwar in Saka 1197, Sopandeva in Saka 1199 and Muktabai in Saka 1201. All these children were precious spiritual gems but orthodox people of Alandi thought it a bad omen even to look at them. Dejected with these adverse circumstances, Vitthalpant went to Tryambakeshwar (near Nasik) with his wife and children when Nivrittinath happened to enter a cave where Gahininath dwelt and was initiated by him. When returning to Alandi, Vitthalpant asked

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the Brahmins to tell him some way of alonement. He was told that there was no other remedy except sacrificing his life. So one day, leaving his wife and children he went to Prayag and ended his life by throwing himself into the sacred Ganga. Some months passed and Rukmini also followed her dear husband and did the same thing. Yet the orthodox Brahmins were not satisfied. They wanted a certificate of purification from the Pandits of Paithan. Nivrittinath, with his brothers and sister went to Paithan accordingly. But the Pandits ridiculed them. It is said that they were silenced only when Jnaneshwar caused a buffalo to recite Vedic hymns in their presence.

While returning to Alandi all of them halted at Newase on the bank of Pravara in the present Ahmednagar district. There, on the command of his brother and Guru, Nivrittinath, Jnaneshwar delivered extempore the exposition of *Shrimad Bhagavadgita* in Marathi. It was in *Ovi* metre and was taken down by his disciple Sachchidanand Baba. This happened in Saka 1212 when Jnaneshwar was only a lad of fifteen. After this commentary called *Jnaneshwari,* Jnaneshwar also wrote an independent philosophical work *Amritanubhava* according to the desire of Nivrittinath.

Changdev was a great Yogi who was proud of his Yogic powers. When Jnaneshwar returned to Alandi he went there but his pride vanished with the sight of the great personality. Jnaneshwar advised him in 65 verses known as *Changdev Prasasti.*

Pandharpur was a well-known centre of pilgrimage on the bank of Bhima. Namadeva was a great devotee of Shri Vitthal. When Jnaneshwar along with his brothers and sister went to Pandharpur the two saints, Namadeva and Jnaneshwar, became intimate friends. They travelled through the length and breadth of upper India. They went to Varanasi, Delhi and other places making them resound with their sweet *kirtans.* When they returned to Pandharpur there was a great feast in which all the contemporary saints like Goroba the potter, Santata the gardner,

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Chenhoba the untouchable, Parisa Bhagwat the Brahmin participated. Then all of them went to Alandi where Jnaneshwar expressed his wish to enter eternal *samadhi.* It was the eleventh day of the dark half of the month of *Kartik.* They kept awage the whole of the night singing devotional songs. Next day, they all dined together. Then the four sons of Namadeva—Nara, Vitha, Mahada and Gonda cleansed the place of *samadhi.* Namadeva besmeared the body of Jnaneshwar with sandal paste, marked his forehead with the *tilak* of musk, put garlands of fragrant flowers and performed *puja.* On the thirteenth day Jnaneshwar sat on the *asan* and entered *sajiva samadhi,* amidst the subdued sobs of his own loving sister, brothers and devotees. The day is held sacred and thousands of pilgrims visit this holy place to pay their homage to the great saint. Since that time Alandi has become a great centre of the *Varkari* cult in Maharashtra.

Jnaneshwar was barely twenty-two when he entered eternal *samadhi.* Within a year his brothers and sister followed him. Sopandev entered *samadhi* at Saswad in the month of *Margasirsh,* Muktabai at Adilabad in the month of *Vaisakha* and Nivrittinath in the month of *Jyestha* at Tryambakeshwar.

The authentic works of Jnaneshwar are—*Jnaneshwari* or *Bhavartha dipika, Amritanubhava, Changdeva Prasashti, Haripath, Naman* and miscellaneous *Abhangas.* There are other works like Bhaktiraj and Panchikaran, but they are spurious.

Jnaneshwari is a celebrated Marathi commentary on the *Bhagavadgita* and is the magnum opus of Jnaneshwar. It is also called *Bhavartha dipika*—a torch enlightening the import of the original text. Though Jnaneshwar out of humility says at the end of the work that he is following former *Bhashyakars,* his outlook and exposition are original and significant. The seven hundred verses of the *Bhagavadgita* are expounded in about nine thousand *Ovis.* Jnaneshwar, gives his spiritual lineage of

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Nath-sampradaya in the last chapter thus—*Siva Sakti—Matsyendranath -Gorakshanath -Gahininath -Nivrittinath -Jnaneshwar.* Nivrittinath, the elder brother of Jnaneshwar was initiated by Gahininath. He in his turn initiated Jnaneshwar and became his spiritual teacher. Jnaneshwar now and then describes in this work the glory of the grace of guru, "Like a true mother, the grace of the guru waves lights of spiritual illumination before the aspirant and puts on him the ornaments of spiritual gold" (*Jnaneshwari,* XII-6). While commenting on the word *Acharyopasti*—the worship of the spiritual master—he has described the various moods and sentiments of a true disciple in ninety matchless *Ovis* that reveal his own love and yearnings to serve his guru.

Jnaneshwar gives prominence to *Bhaktiyoga* or the path of loving devotion in *Jnaneshwari.* He tries to bring out fully the spirit of such love divine that pervades the Song of the Lord. The tradition of *Nath Sampradaya* is generally regarded as that of *Yogic sadhana.* But Jnaneshwar reveals to us in that very tradition a prominent feature of *Premabhakti*—loving devotion also.

Jnaneshwari is the first greatest work in Marathi language both from the point of view of a high literary excellence and of an elevating philosophy of life. Prof. Patwardhan has aptly described its literary value in his Wilson Philological lectures. He says :

"The *Jnaneshwari* is from the literary side so exquisite, so beautiful, so highly poetic in the metaphors and comparisons, similes and analogical illustrations, so perspicuous and lucid in style, so rich in fantasy, so delightful in its imagery, so lofty in its flights, so sublime in tone, so pure in taste that not withstanding the profundity and the recondite nature of the subject, the reader is simply fascinated, floats rapturously on the crest of the flow and is lost in the cadence of the rhythm and sweet insinuating harmonies, till all is thanksgiving and thought is not." *Jnaneshwari* is the gospel of thousands of *Varkaris* i.e. devotees of Vithal who regularly visit Pandharpur.

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Amritanubhava.—This is the greatest philosophical work of Jnaneshwar, in which he has not relied on any authority but on his own spiritual experience and insight. He has put forth his theory of *Chidvilas* refuting the other theories like dualism of *Samkhya, Nihilism* and subjective idealism of Bauddhas, and *Ajnanavad* of a *Kevaladvaitin* like Sankaracharya. It ends in revealing the secret of natural devotion and in this way forms the philosophical foundation of the *Bhakti* cult in Maharashtra. It has several commentaries like those of *Sivakalyan, Harihar, Vireshwar, Hansaraj, Niranjan* and others.

Changdev Prasasti.—A small work of 65 *Ovis* gives a clear exposition of Jnaneshwar's theory of *Chidvilas* written in a short compass. They are addressed to Changdeva who was a *Hathayogi.*

Haripath.—The word *Haripath* means loving remembrance of the name of Lord Hari. *Haripath* consists of twenty-eight *Abhangas.* They are daily recited by *Varkaris.* Jnaneshwar has described in the *Haripath* the importance of the name of God. The utterance of the name of God is the royal road to God-realisation. All the other means like yogic practices, rituals, sacrifices are of no avail. The name for God is like the door of his temple. If any one stands there even for a moment he goes beyond four salvations.

Naman.—It is hymn in praise of the Lord of the universe, It contains 108 *Ovis* and describes the significance of prayer.

Miscellaneous *Abhangas.*—*Abhangas* are religious lyrics. About six hundred *Abhangas* of Jnaneshwar are available. They are sung at the time of *bhajan.* They deal with various subjects such as the description of Sri Vitthal's lovely form, the sweetness of Lord's name, advice to spiritual aspirants, criticism of religious superstitious and hypocrisy, the futility of asceticism and the supremacy of the path of *bhakti.* There are some *Abhangas* called *Virahinis.* God's love is infinite and a devotee is never satisfied, though he drinks the draughts again and again.

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He is always thirsty and experiencing the pangs of an unsatisfied heart. This peculiar divine experience of the mingling of supreme joy and supreme sorrow is described by Jnaneshwar in these lovely lyrics.

Jnaneshwar, in his *Amritanubhava,* has expounded his theory of the nature of ultimate reality. The ultimate reality is the *atman* or supreme self, It is self-evident. The so-called *pramanas* or means of valid knowledge like preception, inference, etc. are not required to prove its existence because *pramanas* themselves presuppose it. *Atman* is the presupposition of all proofs, for proof themselves require for their working the presence of the very *atman.* It is the sun that illumines all objects and not vice versa. It is the *atman* that illumines all *pramanas* and not the *pramanas* or proofs that illumine the *atman*[1].

Thus the reality or *atman* is self-luminous and self-conscious. Now the self and its cognition form as it were a couple. Jnaneshwar terms them God and Goddess. God and Goddess are divine-parents of the universe[2]. They are inseparable and without limitation. They are also called *Siva* and *Sakti.* They cannot be equated with *Purusha* and Prakirti of *Samkhyas,* because *Purusha* is regarded as sentient and *Prakirti* as inert while God and Goddess are both of them sentient. *Samkhyas* regard *purusha* and *Prakriti* as two separate entities while God and Goddess are inseparable and identical. God and Goddess also cannot be equated with *Brahman* and *Maya* of *Mayavadins. Maya* is regarded as the *upadhi* or distorting limitation of *Brahman.* Goddess on the other hand does not limit God. Both are without limitation. Their uniqueness is brought out by Jnaneshwar who says that the lover himself has become the beloved of his heart. Their love is so deep and intense that they merge in each other and again re-emerge. "How sweet is their union of love. The expanse of the whole universe is insufficient for their sport, yet they reside happily even in a tiny atom. Each is the very life

1. *mritanubhava*—VI. 94.
2. *Amritanubhava*—1.

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of the other so that not even a blade of grass is created without their mutual participation. Though they appear as two, they are one; just as a word is one though lips are two or the fragrance is the same though the flowers are two. The sound is one though sticks are two, the vision is one though eyes are two. So the eternal couple is eternally tasting the sweet nectar of their sweet union. They are inseparable like the sugar and sweetness, camphor and fragrance.[1]"

The universe is, according to Jnaneshwar, nothing but the expression of God's love for himself. The world is not the outcome of ignorance or *avidya* as *ajnanavadins* maintain. Cosmic play is God's glory and not something despicable that conceals Him. "As water sports with itself in the form of waves, the *atman* plays with itself in the form of the universe and feels happy. No difference is created in fire when it wears the garland of flames. The lotus is one though it blooms into a thousand petals. There is no difference in the *atman* when he presents Himself either as the seer of the world or as the world that he sees, for it is all *atman* Himself. If a lump of sugar is broken, it is nothing but sugar[2]."

God is not concealed by His manifestation of the world. Water is always visible without taking away its cover of waves (ch. P. 5).

The lustre of jewel does not hide the jewel itself. The ornament of gold does not keep the gold out of sight. One need not peel the disc of the moon to make it visible. So one need not forsake the world to find God.

In consonance with his healthy and optimistic world-view Jnaneshwar fully brings out dignity and the real status of the individual soul. The individual soul or finite self in its apparent aspect seems to be suffering with so many drawbacks and limitations. But considered from the point of view of the Reality

1. *Amritanubhava*—I, 11-23.
2. *Amritanubhava*—VII, 135-39.

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or God, we can appreciate its immeasurable value. In *Jnaneshwari,* there is the description of intimate relation between Krishna and Arjuna. One is the symbol of the supreme Godhead, other the symbol of finite self. Arjuna is said to be the mirror in which the Lord Krishna loved to see His own fair complexion[1]. This means that the finite self is the medium of experiencing Divine Love. A recent western philosopher, Pringle Pattison says that the intelligent being is rather to be regarded as the organ through which the universe beholds and enjoys itself. In the case of Jnaneshwar we can substitute "God" instead of the word "universe". "There as it were fragrance became the nose and smelt itself; sound became ear and listened to itself; mirror became the eye to see itself; *chakor* became the moon, flowers became the bees, sprouts of mango because the cuckoo."[2] So God became man to experience His own affection.

This view of ultimate reality or God colours Jnaneshwar's ideal of *bhakti* or loving devotion. *Bhakti* is not merely a subjective feeling. It is at the heart of reality. Finite soul has to be in tune with Infinite to experience it. It is not merely a means to something but the end in itself. It is the sumum bonum of life. Before it *mukti* or experience of Yoga pales into insignificance like the moon in sunshine[3]. It is fifth Purushartha[4].

Human life is a precious gift of God. It should be kept clean and holy. The cultivation of moral qualities is essential. Dr. R. D. Ranade rightly observes that Jnaneshwar's great originality consists in making a very acute and accurate analysis of various moral virtues. (Mysticism in *Maharashtra,* p. 71). His use of appropriate imagery to elucidate different virtues is wonderful. It brings home the particular significance of the virtue to the mind of the reader and awakens in him a longing to enrich his life with noble and high moral qualities. Instead of

1. *Jnaneshwari*—VI, 25.
2. *Amritanubhava*—IX. 1—5.
3. *Amritanubhava*—IX, 27.
4. *Jnaneshwari*—XVIII, 867.

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giving a dry discussion, he sets before the readers the very incarnation of that quality. From this point of view the 13th chapter of *Jnaneshwari* is very important. We shall give some instances.

An unpretentious man is he who does not reveal his hidden spiritual treasure as a covetous man never brings out his. Even under pain of death he utters not a word about his hidden wealth, as a vicious cow holds back her milk, or as a public woman hides her age, or as a rich traveller conceals his wealth or as the daughter of a noble family hides her limbs, or as a husbandsman hides his crops, similarly such a man conceals any charitable or good act done by him[1].

The sage whose heart is full of *ahimsa* or harmlessness walks delicately like a bee tenderly moving on the lotus for the fear of disturbing its pollen. The road on which he walks is itself a road of compassion, the direction in which he walks is a direction of love; he spreads his life, as it were below the feet of beings, in order that he may be a source of happiness to all. His hands remain motionless as the mind of a sage whose desires are fulfilled. He raises his hand only to show protection, he stretches his hand only to succour the fallen, he moves his hand only to touch the afflicted, and he does this all so lovingly that even the southern wind might be regarded as harsh when contrasted with his mildness. His love moves first and then move the words from his mouth; compassion comes first and then the words. He remains silent but when lovingly requested he opens his mouth and is as kind to his hearers as a father or a mother. True and soft, measured and sweet his words are, as it were the waves of nectar[2].

The crown of all virtues is God-devotion. "Such a devotee has taken a firm decision that there is no object of love greater than God. His body, mind and speech is solely devoted to God's contemplation. His heart is always in the presence of God, as

1- *Jnaneshwari*, XIII, 203-8.
2. *Jnaneshwari*, XIII, 246-70.

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a wife who will not feel any difficulty in approaching her dear husband. Such a devotee regards nothing as barring his approach to God. He is united with God and still enjoys his love as the water of the Ganga, though she is united with the ocean, plays upon its bosom"[1].

Various moral virtues are, all of them, aspects of one central virtue, which, according to Jnaneshwar, is God-devotion or *bhakti*. *Bhakti* or God-devotion is the central thread of all moral qualities. It is the source as well as the fruit of noble life.

In his philosophical works like *Amritanubhava*, Jnaneshwar criticised various theories and put forth his theory of *Chidvilas*. Standing on the *advaitic* ground he criticised Sankara's *ajnanavad*. Discarding the conception of *ajnan* he improved upon the former *advaitic* thought and said that *bhakti* is possible even in the experience of *advaita*. So, as Prof. S. V. Dandekar suggests, his theory can be termed *Purnadvaita* while the former as *Kevala-dvaita*.

As in the case of theoretic matter he was also a critic of various abnormal religious worships and inhuman practices. He was not merely an acute thinker but a great sage who had realised God and had experience of *yoga, jnana* and *bhakti*. From his own experience he saw that the other pathways like *yoga* and *jnana* fall short of embracing intimately the heart of the reality or God who is nothing but 'Pure Love'. So he upheld the path of *bhakti*. In *bhakti* he found all the good qualities of other paths which were easily absorbed without their difficulties. It was direct approach to Love Divine. The path of devotion is open to all human beings, without any distinction of caste or creed. If there are any defaults, God's grace is always there to give the devotee His helping hand. One need not renounce the world. "If you say that you would abandon your house the burden of your body would be always there. If you renounce

1. *Jnaneshwari*, XIII. 605-609.

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your parents, brothers and relatives, egoism, lust and anger remain with you." (*Gatha of Abhangas*). *Bhakti* is the fruit of right knowledge and spring of right actions. Jnaneshwar teaches us to do our duties in a spirit of worship. Every act should be performed in an attitude of prayer. Jnaneshwar adopts healthy, positive and realistic attitude towards the objects of the world. So in the pathway of loving devotion which he upheld all the organs of senses and tempers of mind, instead of becoming obstacles in the pathway to God, are turned towards Him and become vehicle of his sweet love[1].

Jnaneshwar wrote all his works in the people's language. He was anxious for the uplift of masses. He looked upon the deity of Pandharpur as the symbol of universal love. In Vitthal there was union of Siva and Vishnu. He upheld the worship of Vitthal, the *Varakari* cult and its tradition of annual religious gatherings of *Ashadhi* and *Kartiki* fairs. The Vitthal worship was also handed down to him from *Nath sampradaya.* In this way Jnaneshwar was the promulgator of the religion of love. His exalted view of life, his religion of universal love acceptable to all people at all times, his stress on *bhakti* as the experiencing of divine love in world-relationship enhances the value of his teachings for the modern man whose sufferings largely flow from the malady of a dried up heart.

1. *Jnaneshwari, IX*-45-46.

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VIDYAPATI

Jayakanta Mishra

Vidyapati was the greatest poet of his generation in the whole of north-east India. It is not only because he was one of the distinguished Sanskrit scholars and writers in that language but also because he chose the vernacular as a medium for the bulk of his literary output and thereby caught the imagination of the people. The influence exercised by Vidyapati was unprecedented; poet after poet imitated him; in Bengal, Orissa, Assam and Nepal, his poems were 'twisted and contorted, lengthened and curtailed in language and metre; a long line of Vaishnava saints and mystics in Bengal, Assam and Orissa took inspiration from his poems in a manner that was little or rarely thought of by the poet himself, and to this day his name continues to be a byword in Mithila (Bihar) and Nepal Terai for all sorts of devotional and occasional songs.

Vidyapati was born in about 1360 A.D. at Bisphi, a village in Darbhanga district in Bihar, in the ancient land of Mithila. The country of Mithila was well-known as a centre of learning and culture from times immemorial and during that period it was once again passing through a golden age under the enlightened patronage of the Oinibara kings. The Muslim inroads on the mainland had hardly affected the secluded courts of the Hindu rulers of Mithila and they continued to patronize the arts of literature, music, philosophy and the culture of the land. Mithila, in fact, produced scholars to protect the interests of orthodox Hindus in social and religious matters when they had lost their political independence. *Smriti Nibandhas*—studies in *Mimamsa* and *Nyaya* flourished here under specially favourable circumstances. The galaxy of talented men and women who were Vidyapati's contemporaries includes Pakshadhara Mishra, author

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of the commentary *Aloka* on the *Nyaya* classic, Tattva *Chintamani;* Ayachi Dube who has been regarded since his days as the model of the ascetic scholar in Mithila; Sankar Mishra; Vachaspati Mishra II; Misaru Mishra; Padmanabhadatta; Ruchipati; Rudardhara; Murari Mishra and many other illustrious *Mimamsa* and *Dharmasastra* scholars. As in the days of Janaka and Yajnavalkya, students from neighbouring provinces flocked to Mithila and carried the torch of learning back to their native places. This explains to a large extent how the Mithila school of music and drama and the poetry of Vidyapati spread throughout the North-East of India. Along with their learning the visiting students carried the sweet songs and musical traditions which are recorded in Jyotirishwara Thakur's *Varna-Ratnakara* (14th century) and Lochana's *Raga-Tarangini* (17th century). We have definite evidence of Maithili musicians going and settling in lands as far in the east as Tripura and in the north as Kamarupa and Nepal; and Maithili Pandits are known to have enlightened these provinces with their intellect and culture, indeed to have laid down the norms of social and cultural life.

Having been born into this kind of world Vidyapati could easily ascend the ladder of learning and culture at a very early age. He had at the same time the opportunity of visiting the court where the arts and the sciences were cultivated most assiduously. Vidyapati's ancestors were themselves important officers of the kingdom and had contributed substantially to the cultural renaissance of the Hindus that was taking place in Mithila in the wake of Muslim incursions. His great-great-grandfather Devaditya was a Minister of Peace and War; his great-grandfathers who were seven brothers occupied some of the most enviable positions in the realm; their sons were equally illustrious. One of them Chandeshwara Mahatha wrote a compendium in seven books called *Ratnakars* on Hindu Law. His own grandfather and father were, however, not writers or dignitaries of State. Vidyapati used to visit the court of the Oinibara King along with his father. He describes himself as the playmate of Maharaja

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Kirtisimha and contacted a life-long friendship with Maharaja Sivasingha who ruled over Mithila virtually from about 1407 but actually took up the reins of government in 1412. After the mysterious disappearance of Maharaja Sivasingha in 1416, the poet who had been made the court-poet and rewarded with the gift of his own native village and the title of *Abhinava Jayadeva* resided together from 1416 to 1429 with queen Lakhima who eventually burnt herself with the *Kusha* according to the injunctions of the Hindu *sastras*. These were the best days in the life of the poet. He wrote a large number of his *Radha-Krishna padas*. He also copied the entire *Shrimad-Bhagawata* in his own hand. Happily the entire manuscript autographed by the poet in 1428 is still preserved in the library of the Darbhanga Sanskrit University.

The poet continued to be associated with the Oinibara courts even after the death of the Queen of his dear friend Maharaja Sivasingha. He went to the court of Maharaja Padmasingha and later to that of his Queen Visvasa Devi. Still later he seems to have frequented the courts of Harisimhadeva, Dhirasimhadeva and Bhairavasimhadeva. There is reason to believe that he passed most of his life in the courtly circles. Towards the latter half of his life, however, he appears to have given up the sophisticated and worldly life of the court and devoted himself wholeheartedly to the worship of Lord Siva.

His last days were marked with peace and equanimity. He was no longer a busy man of affairs, but a passionate poet of life and a social and cultural crusader for proper conduct—preaching the real tests of a man (see his work entitled *Purusha Pariksha*). He had two sons from his first wife and a son and a daughter from his second wife. It is said that the Lord Siva himself was pleased with his devotion and revealed Himself once through his servant Ugana. One day, while in the jungle, the story is told, the poet felt thirsty at a spot where no water would be available and the faithful servant Ugana made him drink the nectar of the water of Ganga. The holy drops of Ganga water worked miracles. The poet's inner eyes were opened and all of

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a sudden he had the vision of the Lord Siva in his servant. He fell at the feet of the Lord and prayed for his blessings. It is said that the Lord granted him the Vision Eternal into the Reality and obtained the word of honour from the poet that he would not reveal the Lord's identity to anybody else, as otherwise he would disappear for ever. The story further relates that one morning the poet's wife scolded the family servant and flung a firebrand at him. The poet could not bear the sight of his Deity being defiled thus and divulged his identity to his wife. It is said that the moment this incident took place the Lord disappeared for ever. The poet became most unhappy and went about crying for his Ugana singing hymns in his name which have been popular all these years.

The end of the poet's life is described in the most touching circumstances. It is said Vidyapati saw in a dream the dark image of his friend Maharaja Sivasingha. It is believed that the dark image of a dead person in a dream forebodes one's own death. Scholars have calculated that accordingly the poet died on the thirteenth day of the bright-half of *Kartika* (October) of 1448. The poet had his daughter by his side during his last moments and it is said that the poet could not reach the banks of Ganga when the hour of death arrived. As the story goes, the Ganga was flooded that night and her waters reached the spot where the poet breathed his last. A Siva Linga sprung up where his pyre had been lit and this, and the marks of flood in the river, are still shown to the visitors. The place lies near the Vidyapatinagar Railway Station of North-Eastern Railway.

All these legends emphasize the fact that while the poet was still alive, and more so when he was dead, he enjoyed a high reputation of being a devotee and mystic and an extremely influential and exceptionally saintly personality.

Vidyapati's works fall into two clear divisions as he passed from one end of life to another towards his last days. He wrote, and wrote profusely in Sanskrit, for the purposes of the courts of ruler after ruler. He was by profession a court-poet, a

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Raj-pandit. He wrote panegyrical treatises: the poem *Kirtilata* (The Creeper of Glory) in praise of Maharaja Kirtisimha and the *Kirtipataka* (The Banner of Glory) in praise of Maharaja Sivasingha. He wrote a guide to the various kinds of *dana* (gifts) to be made in the *Danavakyavali* and a guide to the various places of pilgrimages in the *Bhuparikrama*. He wrote a guide to letter-writing in the form of *Likhanavali*. He wrote some works setting forth the duties of a householder round the year (*Varshakritya*), the rites to be performed at Gaya (*Gayapattalaka*) and on the banks of Ganges (*Gangavakyavali*) and two works on devotion to Siva and Durga (*Saivasarasvasara Sambhuvakyavali* and *Durgabhaktitarangini*). All these treatises were rounded off with two profound works that seemed to enable his patrons to have a complete and balanced view of life—one that discussed the laws of partition (*Vibhagasara*), and the other one which suitably explained the various aims of human life and indicated the path of *purushartha* (*Purusha-Pariksha*).

But there is distinctly a creative side to his writings too. It consists of the numerous *padas* (songs) on Siva (*Saivasarwasvasara*), Ganga (*Gangavakyavali*) and Durga (*Durgabhaktitarangini*). These works were not only for the court but also for the common man and woman. Into them he poured his spirit. He could bring to bear upon the subjects taken up in these works a skilful, elegant, and mellifluous style, one that could catch the imagination and emotion of thousands of his countrymen. Moreover, here one finds the poet breaking new records and laying foundations for new types of writing. Here also we may discern a more thorough shift in the poet's approach to life from the worldly sphere to the other-worldly. It is on these that the fame of the poet primarily rests and, therefore, it would be proper for us to study them a little more closely.

The poet was deeply infused with the spirit and diction of Sanskrit love-poetry. At the same time he had an opportunity of reading and copying in detail the story of Krishna and his Gopis

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as given in the *Bhagawata* and Jayadeva's *Gitagovinda*. It was the direct result of his readings in the *Puranas* and Sanskrit love poetry that he designed so many of his Maithili lyrics. The love songs of Vidyapati are more popular among the women folk; they sing them on various occasions of ladies' ceremonies particularly at weddings. The test of a Maithili woman's education and cultural attainments to this day continues to be the answer to the question : 'What songs of Vidyapati can you sing ?'.

Immense are the varieties and uses made of the songs of Vidyapati. The chief of them are called *Tirahuti* which describe the union or separation of the lovers; then there are the *Mana* songs, the *Baramasa,* the Batagamanis, the *Golari,* the *Uchiti,* the *Joga* and so on. Some of these forms of songs are based on folk forms and were undoubtedly meant for the common man and woman of the village. They portray the various facets of love—words of praise, words of shyness, words of explanation, words of innocence, words of union, words of separation and words of anguish—all form part of these songs. The amours of Krishna and Radha are intepreted as representing the human soul's longings for the Universal Soul. The union of Radha or Gopis with Krishna was treated as a symbol of the soul's union with God. In Bengal this interpretation was applied to the love songs of Vidyapati as well. Bengali scholars who visited Mithila in the days of its scholarly superiority were back with the love songs of Vidyapati on their lips. Chaitanya (1456—1534), the first propounder of modern Vaishnavism in eastern India, freely adopted the love songs of Vidyapati as Vaishnava hymns. It is said that he used to fall into swoons while singing these songs. Soon other devotees followed him and devotee after devotee came to regard him as the greatest vernacular exponent of the new Vaishnavism. A contemporary poet Chandidas (latter half of 15th century) adopted many of the lines of Vidyapati in his own works and a legend grew up that the two had met each other and sung of the Lord in the *madhura* manner together.

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From Bengal the fame of Vidyapati as a Vaishnava singer spread to Orissa and Assam. For three or four centuries the whole of eastern India resounded with a new type of literature—the *Padavali* literature, that was inspired by Vidyapati's hymns. The new literature was written in a mixed jargon called Brajboli, of which the base was the Maithili language of Vidyapati. It was also vaguely understood that the land of Krishna's sports with Radha and Gopis, Braja, was closely allied to this type of literature and therefore the language of Braja was also mixed in this medium. The three great Vaishnava devotees of the east—Chaitanya of Bengal, Sankaradeva of Assam and Ramananda Raya of Orissa were inspired by the love songs of Vidyapati.

The fame of Vidyapati in later years was no less for his hymns and devotional songs than for his love songs. Abul Fazl in his *Ain-i-Akbari* records the fame of the musical hymns of Siva written by Vidyapati.

Vidyapati's hymns on Siva, his consort 'Pasupati-Bhamini' and Ganga are by far the more numerous and the more powerful. A distinction ought to be made between the two types of songs on Siva—those that are called *Maheshavani* and those that are called *Nacharis*. The *Nachari* is a straight prayer or description of Siva and his manifold attributes and is sung with utter abandon, usually in the early morning or at the time of worshipping Lord Siva. The *Maheshavani* songs are songs describing the marriage of Gauri with Siva and are usually sung by women at weddings. Frequently the *Maheshavani* contains an address to the mother of Gauri, Menaka, and the idea is to console or please the mother-in-law of the bridegroom. The two names are sometimes confused and hymns on Ganga or those describing the life of Siva and Gauri, are also included under the name *Nachari*. The majority of these devotional songs reveal the common man, his aspirations, his longings, anxieties and complete submission to the will of the Lord. The simplicity and the directness of style revealed in

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these songs are remarkably in contrast to the artistic and careful craftsmanship of his love songs. But their passionate and fervent appeal is great. It was for this reason that Vidyapati was regarded as a saint and the stories of the Lord Siva serving him as a Servant appear credible.

A few equally popular but far less numerous hymns of Vidyapati addressed to Durga have also come down to us. In the hymns to Durga are to be found some of the most touching words of prayer and it is well-known that they have been used in Maithili homes throughout the ages on all auspicious occasions and one of these has been adopted as the inspiring symbol of the neo-Maithili renaissance movement that is afoot in modern Mithila; it is veritably regarded as the national song of Mithila.

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LAL DED

J. L. Kaul

The fourteenth century was a period of storm and stress in Kashmir which witnessed formidable new social and political challenges. It was the time during which Muslim rule was firmly established and Shah Mir deposed Kota Rani (1338-39), the widow-queen of Udyanadeva (1323-1338), and ascended the throne as Shams-ud-din Shah Mir in 1339 A.D. The Muslim missionaries were attracted to the Kashmir Valley to propagate Islam and proselytize the people. Mir Sayyid Ali of Hamadan came with a considerable following in 1379-80 and stayed in the Valley for six years. But though Islam seems to have spread fairly rapidly, it could not, in the early years of the Muslim rule, strike deep roots or transform completely the entire body of mystical tradition, religious beliefs and observances which the people had inherited from ancient times. This had already produced some sort of synthesis or amalgam of Buddhist, Tantric and Idealist Saiva Monism, known as the *Trika* which had appeared or, as some would insist, re-appeared towards the beginning of the ninth century. That there came about an encounter, if not a direct collision, between the old tradition and the new challenge was, however, inevitable even in these early years of the propagation of Islam. Side by side with the saints and missionaries who came from foreign lands, this period saw also the rise of Muslim saints, native to the soil and strongly influenced by the local tradition, and the founding of the famous Muslim Order of *Rishis* or Babas by Sheikh Nur-ud-din Vali of Tsrar Sharif (1376-1438), known as Nund Rishi.

Another result of this encounter was that, though it continued to be for a considerable time the language of official communication and record even after the end of the Hindu rule, Sanskrit

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lost the State patronage and Persian came gradually to occupy its status. It was about this time, when Sanskrit was losing its hold on society, but Persian had not completely replaced it and the Hindu society itself was disintegrating that poetry came to find expression in the real language of the common people.

It was in this socio-religious milieu that Lallesvari or Lalla Arifa, affectionately and popularly known as Lal Ded (Granny Lal) was born about 1335 A.D. Little is known about her life; and indeed the earliest historical reference is found in Azam Dedamari's *Waqiat-i-Kashmir* (1730 A.D.). We cannot even be sure about the exact dates of her birth and death; but tradition has endured and, though much legend has grown round her name and many miracles are told of her, we can with some certainty say a few things about her life. She was born of fairly well-to-do parents at Pandrenthan, about 6.5 kms. to the south-east of Srinagar, where she seems, even at a tender age, to have come under the religious influence of the family priest, Shri Siddha Mol (Venerable Siddha). She was married at the early age of twelve into a Pandit family of Padmapura (now Pampor), about 13 kms. from Srinagar. Here she (now named Padmavati) was harshly treated by her mother-in-law and even accused of infidelity to her husband ; but she suffered it all uncomplainingly and, indeed, underwent a rigorous self-discipline during this time and developed the inner attitude of "holy indifference" and detachment towards all matter-born contacts. The truth was found out soon and what was suspected to be a secret assignation turned out to be her daily tryst with God on whom she used to meditate at a quiet spot away from home when she went on her daily chore of fetching water from the river *ghat*. One morning says the legend, when she went with her pitcher to the *ghat*, her women neighbours teased her about the feast of *grihasanti* which was to be held that day at her house. "What nice dishes you will have today !" said they; "surely you will not forget to invite us." Lalla uttered words in reply that have become a proverb *hond maarytan ya kath Lalli nalavath tsali na zanth* (they may kill a sheep or they may kill a lamb, Lalla will have her

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pebble all right). Quite by accident, her father-in-law overheard the remark and, when food was served to her at home, he verified the truth of it. Her husband too could not appreciate her sublime indifference and mistook it for her coolness towards himself. Time came soon when in an irresistible mood of divine *tyaga* (renunciation), she left her home for ever and took to the life of a wandering recluse, living in jungles and mountain caves, going about in utter disregard of personal appearance, in a semi-nude state. Henceforth she became known as Lal because her abdomen (*lal* in Kashmiri) increased in size and hung loose over her pubic region.

We know from her own verse-sayings, called *Vaakh* (Sanskrit *Vakya,* word) that she was upbraided by some and respected by others, but neither praise nor blame affected her. It is certain that during her wanderings about the Valley she met many sannyasins and saints and fakirs, both Hindu and Muslim; and the tradition is persistent that she met Mir Sayyid Ali of Hamadan and that she inspired Nund Rishi with her teachings, who held her in great respect. Says he :

> That Lalla of Padmapore, she drank
> her fill of divine *amrita* and found
> her seat in the lap of Lord. O God,
> grant me the same blessed wish !

What is undeniably certain is that she has wielded a remarkable influence on the popular religious thought of both Hindus and Muslims of Kashmir ; and there is hardly any comparable figure anywhere of a Hindu saint being held in such reverence by Muslims and Hindus alike. Muslim chroniclers have written of her as "arifa Kamila Lalla majzooba" (*Azam Dedawari*) and "arifa Kamila sani Rabia" (*Tarikh-i-Hassan*); and she is to this day regarded as a God-realized saint and inspired teacher and her *Vaakh* (verse-sayings) are still popular. She was indeed a precursor of that cultural and religious fusion which took place in Kashmir as well as in other parts of India between the ancient

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spiritual heritage of Vedanta and the new Sufi tradition of Islam.

It is important to understand why Lal Ded has had this mighty hold on people's thought and affection. There are three main reasons. First, while she continued the indigenous Saiva tradition, she gave expression to it in a popular form and, much more significantly, in the real language of the people themselves. Perhaps for the first time in Kashmir were mystical truths and the disciplines relevant to their realization made available to the people at large, then mostly unlettered here as elsewhere, in the language they spoke. It is however not the abstruse philosophical truths nor even the disciplines of *Kundalini* and *Nada-bindu yoga* that made her the poet-saint of the people. It is rather the sincerity of faith, the stamp of intensity of her mystic experience and the authenticity of her poetic expression revealed by an energy of idiom and homely but terse imagery, unsurpassed till the present day, that has given her verse-sayings a lasting eminence both in the people's minds and in Kashmiri literature. Her sayings have been in vogue even in the speech of today and retain their freshness of appeal for all alike, whether scholar or peasant. In her verses we find a self-certifying passionate apprehension of mystical truths which is the mark of a God-realized saint.

Secondly, there is little doubt that the cult of Muslim *Rishis* contained much that had come down from Buddhist and Saiva mystical disciplines; and, indeed, similarities have been traced even between them and the tenets, particularly of *hama-ost* (all that is is He) sufi tradition, of Muslim sufi saints who came from foreign lands. That is how it came about that the *Rishis* (as observed in *Ain-i-Akbari*) "did not suffer themselves to be fettered by traditions and were true worshippers of God, and reviled not any other sect." Even as late as the last decade of the 19th century, Sir Walter Lawrance[1], who knew the Valley intimately, observed that "the rural Muslim population

1. *The Valley of Kashmir* (O.U.P. London 1895).

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was very unlike other Muslims in the matter of tolerance for Hindus and reverence for the shrines of the *Rishis.*"

Thirdly, Lal Ded had no patience with hypocrisy or mere outward observance of the ritualism of the time, such as idol worship, nor with the narrow exclusiveness of society. She spoke bluntly against animal sacrifice and always stressed the purity of mind and good conduct. She was free from all dogma, and had the Hindu's catholicity for different creeds. It does not matter by what name we call Him :

Siva wa Keshav wa Jinn wa
Kamalazanatha naam daryan yus

(whether we call him Siva or Vishnu or Buddha or Brahma, what matters is following the path of God in the right spirit).

It is in the context of these circumstances that we can understand the reverence in which Lal Ded has been universally held in Kashmir. Shams Faqir (1843-1904), a revered mystic fakir-poet, sang of her.

> Lalla merged her *prana* in the Transcendent Void;
> and while ostensibly she went to bathe at the shrine at Shurahyar ghat, with a leap and a bound she jumped across this world to where there is none but God.

While we know little, except as oral tradition and legend, of her wordly life, we can know a good deal of her spiritual biography from her verse-sayings, expressed in the poetic form called *Vaakh* of which she was the innovator. The *Vaakh* in Kashmiri is mystical or didactic in content and a sententious 4-line stanza in its form, sometimes rhymeless but usually rhyming *abab, abcb, abac.* There is a flexibility in her verse and we can discern stress being substituted for quantity. Her *Vaakh* shows her to have been a Saiva Yogini, as noticed by Paramananda (1791-1879), another famous mystic-poet of the last century :

> Unique in her yoga of *dvadasanta mandala,* realising *anahata, nada, bindu,* and *Om,* Lalleshwari attained to the Supreme *Ananda.*

How did Lalla attain to the Supreme or, as she put it, "the

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Ineffable Somewhat" ? In poignant verses she expresses her early striving, her keen longing and *vairagya*, her "night of the spirit" and "dryness of the soul".

I weep and weep for thee, my soul,
The illusion of the world hath befallen thee
Which, like an iron anchor, binds thee fast.
Not for thee will survive even a shadow of the things thou lovest.
Alas ! why then hast thou forgot thine own true Self ?
Ah me ! the five, the ten, and the eleven[1],
Have scrapped out this pot and gone away.
Should they all unite and pull upon the rope,
Why should the cow of the eleven go astray ?

In moving imagery and idiom, racy of the soil, Lal Ded tells us that in this world she feels like one towing a boat with an unspun thread; she is here wasting like water in unbaked clay; the burden of this unintelligible world with its sensual pleasures is like a heavy sugar candy load that has bent her body double, and it galls her back; the truth she has heard from her Guru, that she must lose the world to find the Self, has been a blister of loss to her; the flock of her senses has lost its shepherd; and almost in helpless despair, she cries to God :

dyava bozi day myon me ti diyi taar
(Would that God heard my prayer and brought me safe across !)

In a picturesque succession of metaphors like the ones above, she tells us how on her spiritual path she has had to undergo all the painful processes that a newly-picked cotton pod undergoes from the moment when the cleaner and the carder kick it to the time when spun into "gossammar yarn" and woven into cloth and then dashed on the washing-stone, the tailor eventually works his scissors on it. There are continuous references in her verses to the hard disciplines she practised, mainly the

[1] The five *bhutas* and the ten vital airs; the eleven are the ten *indriyas* and *manas*. The *pot* and the *cow* refer to the *Jiva*.

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awakening of the *kundalini* by means of mastering her vital airs, *prana* and *apana*. These, for instance :

1. I worked and worked at the bellows-pipe
till the light flared forth and I saw the true Self,
till the light shone within and spread without.
2. The steed of mind speedeth over the sky
and a lakh leagues traverseth he in the twinkling of the eye.
Yet a man of true intelligence can rein in the curvetting steed,
and on the wheels of *prana* and *apana* guide his chariot aright.
3. I closed the doors and windows of my body's mansion,
and caught my life-breath as a thief within;
I bound him fast in the cell of my heart, and with the stinging whip of *OM* I flayed him there.
4. Searching and seeking Him, I, Lalla, wearied myself,
and even beyond my strength I strove.
Looking for Him, I found his doors bolted and barred;
this deepened my longing and stiffened my resolve;
and I would not move but stood where I was,
full of longing and love, to gaze on Him.
5. Mastering my vital airs, I cut my way
through Forests Six[1], when the mystic Moon awoke
for me and the world of *Prakriti* dried up.
Thus came I to where I found the Lord.

Lalla impresses upon us the truth that mere ritual, pilgrimage or formal worship will not do. "An idol is but stone and a temple is but stone", she declaims, and it is the height of folly to "offer a living sheep to a lifeless stone". She thinks little of miracles :

To stop the flowing water, to cool a raging fire,
to roam the skies on sandalled feet

1. The six *chakras* or the six sheaths of Sakti which must be pierced before the Moon of the Sahasrara is reached wherefrom nectar flows downwards to the *nadis*.

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to get milk from a wooden cow—
all this is base jugglery and nothing more.

He alone is worthy to seek the Lord who has slain the three highway robbers—Lust, Pride and Greed. A true seeker, in his humility and loving kindness, learns to be the servant of all (*logun dasa*); and, he has to empty his mind of all vain imaginings and rivet his mind continuously upon his true Self. This is hard to do and rarely done. *Siva chuy kruth* : Siva is hard to find; and mere quietism of self-suppression or mere wishing is of little avail. As for herself (says she) the impurities within her burnt away and desires slain, she knelt, just there, on bended knees and would not stir. She would not give in and, indeed, longed the more to behold Him who was beyond her sight, and as she stood gazing at the door, Lo ! He opened it and

"There, within myself, I saw Him whole" and "He was all and everywhere and I was not."

Says she :

1. When by oft-repeated discipline, the wide expanse of the manifested universe is lifted to the Void;
when the saguna becomes merged in the *akasa* with a splash, like water falling into water;
when even the ethereal Void is dissolved
and nothing remains but the Weal :—
then, O Bhatta, learn this is the true doctrine for you.
2. Here, there is no word, nor thought, no transcendent nor non-transcendent;
nor is there entry here by vows of silence,
or *mudras* betokening mystic postures;
here not even does *Siva-Sakti* (*Tattva*) remain;
That somewhat which remains is the truth for you.
3. The soul is ever new, the moon is ever new;
so do I see this world for ever new and new.
Since I, Lalla, scoured my body and mind
(all yesterdays and tomorrows faded away),
I live in the ever present Now,
for ever new and new.

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Now there was nought for her to do or to abstain from doing; there was nothing anywhere but He; and, indeed, even in this world of name and form, it is He,

"the Narayana sporting Himself in wonderful forms."

And, now says she,

Whatever work I did, that was worship;
Whatever I uttered, that became a *mantra;*
This recognition entered every fibre of my being
As the essence of the knowledge of Parama Siva.

Ice and snow and water, says she, seem separate entities but when the sun shines, they become one; likewise the Supreme is the Reality behind.

"the one Siva and Universe and soul".

Thus did Lal Ded enrich the thought and literature of Kashmir and, what is significant, leave behind a forceful message for tolerance and understanding and, indeed, a possible synthesis of cultures for the land of her birth. She has been not only the most famous poet-saint of Kashmir but the maker of Kashmiri poetry, endowing it with the qualities of effective metaphor and imagery drawn from the familiar surroundings, with memorable sayings that have become current coin;

"and, what is more, with
vision which increases the power of speech;
with inspired speech which makes vision more penetrating'.

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KABIR

R. P. Tiwari

Kabir, a great teacher and religious reformer, occupies a place of considerable importance in the religious history of India. Though there is a controversy as regards the dates of his birth and death, it is generally accepted that he was born in 1398 A.D. and died in 1518 A.D.

A number of stories are current among his followers regarding his origin. This is not to be wondered at for such legends are associated with almost all great teachers and saints. According to one account Kabir was born of a virgin Brahmin widow. One day she accompanied her father on a visit to Swami Ramananda, who lived in Kasi (Varanasi). The great spiritual guru blessed her that she might conceive a son. Slight variations on the theme are provided by a few other versions. One of these we owe to Maharaj Raghuraj Singh, the author of *Bhaktamala Rama Rasikavali* who says that the Brahmin widow served the spiritual guru and that one day in a trance he blessed her that she might be the mother of a son. Another version has it that to save her from disgrace Ramananda contrived that the child should be born from his mother's hand. According to yet another, the mother abandoned the child to escape disgrace and it was brought up by a weaver named Niru and his wife Nima.

It is also said that the mother went to pluck flowers in Swamiji's garden. In order to hide the flowers from Swamiji, she said, when accosted by him, that it was her belly and not flowers; Swamiji said, 'amen' and as a result she conceived and Kabir was born. The author of the *'Bijak of Kabir'*, Rev. Ahmad Shah has a different story to tell. Kabir, in his opinion, was the son of Swami Ashtanand. The followers of Kabir believe that Swami

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Ashtanand was the first to see the divine light descending on a lotus flower floating in Lahar Talab (tank) in Kasi and reported the same to Swami Ramanand. They assert that Kabir was an incarnation.

From the tangled web of so many views on Kabir's origin or parentage it is difficult to draw any acceptable conclusion. The story that he was brought up by a weaver named Niru and his wife Nima is, however, more or less accepted. Here again the question arises regarding the family he was born in and the religion it professed.

Kabir is said to have been born in a *Julaha* (weaver) family. On the authority of Raidas and Pipa who were his co-disciples and contemporaries it is stated that he was born in a family of Mohammedan weavers. To reconcile this this statement with his high Hindu ideals and his leanings towards yoga it is said that the family in which he was brought up was a recent convert to Islam from the *Yugis* and according to some the *Koris* (a low Hindu caste in Uttar Pradesh), who were followers of the *Nath-cult* and paid only outward homage to Islam remaining substantially unchanged inwardly. Kabir himself refers to his caste as *Julaha* but this leads us nowhere because even today in some parts of U.P. and Bihar there are Hindu *Julahas* and Muslim *Julahas*. Though opinions differ very much whether he was born in a Mohammedan family it cannot be denied that the family he was born in was familiar with Hindu religion and Hindu traditions and also with Islam.

It is said that Kabir had a small family. Besides his parents his family consisted of his wife Loi, son Kamal and daughter Kamali. But even the fact of his family is also not without controversy. As regards his wife, son and daughter it is prevalent among the *Kabir panthis* that they had a miraculous birth. Followers of Kabir hold that he was unmarried.

Likewise there is controversy as regards his spiritual Guru. It is generally agreed that his Guru was Ramanand though there are some scholars who hold that Kabir was the disciple of

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Sheikh Taql, *Kabir panthis* cite the following *Doha* to show that Kabir was the disciple of Ramanand :

Bhakti Dravid Upaji laye Ramanand
Pragat Kari Kabir ne sat deep navkhand

[*Bhakti* originated in the Dravida Desh (the South) and was brought to the North by Ramanand. Kabir diffused it throughout the seven *dwipas* and nine *khandas*].

An interesting story is told as to how he managed to become the disciple of the great Guru Ramanand. Since he was born in a *Julaha* family Ramanand refused to accept him as his disciple. But as Kabir was greatly devoted to him he remained undaunted even after the rebuffs received at the hands of Ramanand. One day in the *Brahma Muhurta* (early dawn) he laid himself down on the steps of the Panchaganga Ghat in Kashi. Ramanand, as was his wont, went to bathe at the said Ghat at that hour and unknowingly struck Kabir on his head with his foot. Swamiji uttering *Ram Ram* proceeded towards the river. Kabir declared himself afterwards as the disciple of Ramanand. He related everything truthfully when accosted later on by Ramanand. Ramanand was very much pleased and embraced him.

It can safely be said that Kabir was brought up in a society which was not looked upon with favour by the Hindus nor was fully accepted by the Muslims. No wonder he was free from all kinds of inhibitions and could proclaim his faith with full vigour and self-confidence. Kabir was unlettered and of low origin and it can very easily be surmised that he had no deep acquaintance with the Hindu Sastras but whatever he has said has the stamp of his personality and his simplicity born out of self-realisation. The knowledge he had gained and the Truth which he had realised were not the outcome of reading of the *Sastras* but of his own spiritual experiences. Unfettered by the scholastic traditions of the Hindus he could easily reject the outward signs of Hinduism and denounce in strong terms what he considered useless and hypocritical in the religious practices of the Hindus. Says Kabir:

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Mera tera manua kaise ik hoi re !
Main kahta hon aankhin dekhi
Tu kahta hai kagad ki lekhi;
Main kahta surjhavanhari
Tu rakhyo arujhayi re !

Addressing the Pandits he asks how can there be a meeting of their minds ? For whatever he says is the result of his own spiritual experiences whereas they say what is written in their sacred books.

Kabir died at Magahar in Basti District of the Uttar Pradesh. Some scholars claim that Magahar where Kabir died is near Kasi. After his death a dispute arose amongst his Hindu and Muslim followers as to the disposal of his remains. The Hindus desired to cremate and the Muslims to bury them. While they were wrangling they heard a divine voice from heaven and raised the cloth which covered the corpse. They found that the body was not there and in its place there was a heap of flowers. The followers ceased wrangling and divided the flowers into two. One half was burnt after the Hindu custom at a spot in Kasi and a Samadhi was constructed there. The spot is now known as Kabir *charua*. The Mohammedan followers buried the other half at Magahar and built a tomb there. Since then it became the head-quarters of the Muslim followers of the sect. It is said that a Mohammedan officer of the Mughal army repaired the tomb in 1567.

Kabir did not write any treatise on the doctrines of what is known today as the *Kabir Panth*. He was a seeker of Truth and we may have an idea of what he tried to teach from his writings. However, one may safely assert that belief in a supreme being is the foundation of his teaching but it is very difficult to define that supreme being. The Lord is beyond speech and sight and therefore to describe him is to attempt to achieve the impossible. In the words of Kabir

Jas kathiye tas hote nahin, jas hai taisa soyi

[what you speak of Him, that he is not. He is what He is (*Kabir*

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Granthavali, p. 310)]. And elsewhere again he says, none knows Thee as Thou art, what people speak of Thee does not conform to it (*Kabir Granthavali,* p. 103,47). But Kabir has realised that the one Lord exists and anything else beside Him is nothing but the outcome of illusion and is artificial as the reflection in a mirror. For Kabir God is not only the overlord but also all-pervading. He permeates the whole universe even as butter permeates milk.

Gheeve doodh mein rami raha byapak sab hi thaur

The absolute reality is beyond our comprehension and the speech makes a futile attempt to express It. The one Lord who parvades all is indivisible indestructible. He has got no colour, no body and cannot be measured by time and space (*Kabir Granthavali,* p. 102).

Abaran akal aik avinashi ghat ghat aap rahai

But Kabir does not like even to describe Him as one. He says :

Aik kahoon to hai nahin, doyai kahoon to gaari
Hai jaisaa taisan rahai, kahat Kabir Bichari Bichari

[If I say He is one, it is false and if I attribute duality to Him it is an abuse. Kabir after fully reflecting over it declares let Him be what He is.]

Kabir has called Him Rama but his Rama is not an incarnation of Vishnu. For Kabir the implication of Rama is other than what the three worlds say.

Dasarath sut tihon lok bakhana
Ram nam ka maram hai jana

Kabir has sung the glory of Krishna, Narasimha and other *avataras* of the Hindus but denied that God incarnated in these *avataras* because Brahman is beyond birth and death. Kabir says that He, the *Niranjan* is beyond all (*Kabir Granthavali,* p. 227). For Kabir truth in respect of God is beyond *Saguna* and *Nirguna.*

Kabir holds that God is all-pervading . He is present everywhere as a whole and yet is beyond everything. This

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pervasiveness is so complete that Kabir asks.

Sunu sakhi piu mahi jiu basai,
Jiu mahi basai ki piu.

[O tell me my friend whether the heart is in the Beloved or the Beloved in the heart.]

So far as Kabir is concerned he has no doubt that the Creator is in the universe and the universe in the Creator and therefore wherever he sees, he sees Him alone. This every insignificant little creature has its share of the Infinity of the Absolute in itself. Therefore apart from God, the world, animate or inanimate, has no separate existence or reality of its own.

Man is oblivious of his reality due to *Maya*—deception of appearances and his own elusive nature. Once he frees himself from this *Maya* he realises that he is in all and all are in him and there is none else but he. Kabir declares that it is only after this realisation of his identity that he himself called himself Kabir and that he himself revealed himself.

Hamhin aap Kabir Kahava;
Hamhin apana aap lakhava

This is the blending of the drop with the ocean and the ocean blending with the drop :

Herat, herat hai sakhi rahya Kabir hiraayi
Boond samani samand main so kat herya jaayi
herat herat hai sakhi rahya Kabir hiraayi,
samand samana boond main so kat herya jaayi

But this identity cannot be established by reasoning. Kabir says philosophy cannot attain to Him. God can be realised, identity can be established only when one takes recourse to *sahaj* and transcends the coarse mental processes. This *sahaj* has been defined by Kabir as the diverting of the five senses from the morbidities of a sensual life and diverting them to the Lord and consequently to attain to Him. Dadu, another saint of the period, has to say the following as regards the *sahaj* :

Dadu sarvar sahaj ka, tamain prem tarang
Tahan man jhoolay atma, apane sayin sang

[In the laks of *sahai* there are the waves of love. The soul sports

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with the Lord.]

Kabir and other saint-poets of the period believe that good deeds or acquisition of knowledge, though laudable in themselves, will not go a long way in gaining salvation. It is only possible through *Bhakti,* the love for the Lord. Kabir says 'The lock of error shuts the gate, open it with the key of love'. For Kabir it is love which has opened the portals into divinity and given him the vision of the Lord. It is love which has raised him from the pettiness of *I* and *mine.*

Sabda or word occupies the most important place in the doctrine of Kabir. For those who wish to know the truth will have to investigate the *sabda.* Kabir says that the world is born of the *omkar* and is destroyed by *vikar* (disintegration).

Omkarai jag upjai, vikarai jag jaye

For the *sadhaka* a guide, who has himself learned to know God, is necessary. Without the assistance of the Guru one cannot proceed on his spiritual path. In the choice of the guide one must have patience. A teacher should not be accepted in haste without being tested. Likewise the Guru also should not be in haste to accept one as a disciple. Guru is considered so important that for the novice he is even greater than the Lord, for it is by the grace of the Guru that the disciple learns to look up to the grace of the Lord and to efface himself in his way.

The *sadhana* of Kabir (and others like him of the *Nirguna Panth*) is individualistic in character but he was not apathetic to or oblivious of the light of his fellow creatures. He had love and compassion for them. For him there was no distinction between man and man. He knew that the God of all religions is the same. He has said that if we explore our hearts we will find that there are both Rama and Rahim and we owe our existence to Ali and Rama and therefore we should show similar tenderness to all that lives. His outspokenness and bitter criticism of the deadening weight of ritual and complications of thought with which Brahmanism and Islam were overlaid was in reality prompted by his love for his fellow creatures. People sometimes misunderstand this

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and ascribe it to his vanity.

He considers himself merely a tool of God. He is simply an instrument through which He fulfils His wish. Kabir says, 'He himself has done nothing, he could not have done anything. He is incapable of doing anything. Whatever is done it is God that did it. Thus, too, did Kabir come into existence.'

We may conclude with a reference to the works of Kabir. The lists of Kabir's works given in different sketches of Kabir's life are numerous. H. H. Wilson (1846) mentions eight works while West Cott (1906) fortytwo and Dr. Ram Kumar Verma (1957) fiftysix. In these works are collected the *Sakhis,* the *padas* and the *Ramainis.* It is said that Kabir was unlettered and that his utterances were written down by his disciples. Naturally there is scope for his utterances getting mixed up with those of other saints. Even the devoted followers of the saints have contributed much to this confusion. They considered it a privilege to be able to compose verses by way of elucidating the words of their Gurus and their compositions also passed under the names of the saints. There have been interpolations too. Sects and sub-sects which grew and developed in course of time found it easy to resort to these means in order to gain their own ends. It is therefore very difficult to distinguish the authentic from the spurious. A modern researcher, Dr. Parasnath Tiwari, has taken great pains and devoted several years to study this complex problem. In his book *Kabir Granthavali* (1961) he accepts only two hundred *padas,* twenty *Ramainis,* one *chautisi Ramaini* and seven hundred and forty *Sakhis* to be genuine. There are three works of Kabir which occupy a place of honour in the numerous writings attributed to the saint. They are *Bijak,* writings of Kabir which found place in the *Adi Granth* of the Sikhs and *Kabir Granthavali.* The *Bijak* of Kabir is considered to be genuine by his followers. These works provide material for understanding the personality, philosophy and the importance of Kabir. For centuries Kabir has been an inspiration to a huge mass of people in India and is still living in the faith of a large number of his followers

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SANKARADEVA

Maheswar Neog

In August-September 1449 was born a Kayastha boy in a village called Bardowa on the river Brahmaputra in the present-day district of Nowgong in the State of Assam. His father, Kusumavara was the *Siromani* or overlord of a number of chiefs or landlords known as *Bhuyans*, who ruled over principalities of varying sizes lying on both the banks of the river. The boy was, as popularly believed, the fruit of a boon obtained from Lord Siva enshrined in a nearby temple, and came to be known on that account as Sankara or Sankaravara. He lost his mother, Satyasandha, soon after his birth and his father sometime after that and was left to the loving care of his grandmother. Sankara grew up to be a well-built and lovely lad. But his boyish pranks knew no bounds. He loved ever to live an open air life, going after the cattle, swimming across the strong currents of the Brahmaputra, wrestling with his play-mates and playing all the time. He was twelve years of age, but had no mind to go to school. One day his grandmother took advantage of his sitting to a heavy meal to remind him how scholarly were his forefathers and how he made a sad contrast by proving himself to be no better than a street urchin even at the age of twelve! Sankara was cut to the quick. He submitted himself to the control of his grandmother, who now took him to a renowned pandit Mahendra Kandali and put him into Kandali's boarding school. But the child found the hard work at studies very irksome and tried to steal a day's holiday by bribing the pandit with a little money and a piece of cloth. Kandali, however, reported the whole matter to Sankara's grandmother, who scolded the grandchild very severely indeed. The scolding had the desired effect, for Sankara now spared no pains to pore over ancient folios. He achieved miracles by becoming a scholar in the conventional

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Sanskrit lore in about six years, by being able to compose a hymn in the tripping *totaka* metre at the beginning of his student career, and by writing in verse a narrative, *Harischandra-upakhyana,* when still at school. He paid his guru handsomely for the education he got and returned to his family.

Sankara's relatives insisted on his taking up the duties of *Siromani Bhuyan,* whereas he himself preferred a life of scholastic and religious persuasion. Under the kinsfolk's pressure he was forced to marry at the age of twenty-one. He was also installed as *Siromani.* All the same, he did not give up his scholarly habits. About four years after the marriage a daughter was born to the Siromani Bhuyan. This was followed soon by the death of Sankara's wife, which made him lose all interest in worldly life. He waited till the sixth or seventh year of his daughter so that she might be married to a Kayastha youth of some ability. This done he assigned the overlordship to two of his uncles and set out on his first pilgrimage at the age of thirty-two years in 1481 A.D. in the company of seventeen others, including his teacher, Mahendra Kandali, and his lifelong friend and associate, Rama-rama Vipra. He visited Puri, Gaya, Prayaga, Vrindavana, Mathura, Kurukshetra and other holy places. It is not certain whether he travelled in Southern India as some later biographers would like us to believe. It was at Badarikashrama that he made one of his earliest lyrics (*bargila*) beginning.

> Rest my mind, rest on the feet of Rama,
> Seest thou not the great and approaching ?
> My mind, every moment life is shortening,
> Just heed, any moment it might fleet off.

It is clear that a sense of transitoriness of life and the world had seized the mind of this young man very strongly. Although he remained away from home for twelve years, it is probable that he spent a considerable part of this long time in Puri. Born a Sakta, he seems to have a revelation there and to have come to the firm faith that devotion to one god, Lord Krishna or Jagannatha, alone could lead men to Supreme Bliss. He had no

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spiritual preceptor, and Jagannatha is considered to have taken that place in his life.

When Sankara returned home in 1493 A.D. his mind was charged with the warmth of a new faith of Love, *bhakti dharma.* He saw how the holy places like Puri and Varanasi were echoing with a new type of songs. Fain would he now devote all his energies to the propagation of his *dharma.* His kinsfolk took note of this and pressed on him to marry again and resume the duties of *Bar-Bhuyan* or *Siromani Bhuyan.* He yielded on the first point and married Kalindi, but, declining to be an administrator again, had a temple built for him so that he could sit with other people to discuss matters spiritual and hold prayers. A Tirhut Brahmin, Jagadisa Misra, brought him from Puri the full text of the *Bhagavata-purana,* furnished with Sridhara Swami's *Bhavartha-dipika* commentary. He went deep into this *bhakti* text as interpreted by one of its best commentators, and seriously started on the programme of proselytising and building a literature in the Assamese language to incorporate the soul of *bhakti.* Thus he composed some sections of his most popular work, *Kirtana-ghosha,* narrating tales from the *Bhagavata-purana* and other holy texts. In these he propounded the doctrines of his *ekasarana nama dharma,* enjoining unswerving devotion to one god, Vishnu—Krishna, and prayers as the sole *sadhana* of that devotion.

It is about this time that Sankaradeva is said to have organised a dramatic performance, *Chihna-yatra,* depicting Vishnu in his celestial abode in a series of seven scenes painted as background on paper. For this he had to make very elaborate preparations by having *mridangas* and other instruments made for him and rehearsing the actors and musicians. He himself played the role of Narayana at one stage and charmed the theatre-goers with marvellous dances. A great number of people were attracted to him, and he now became a preacher, receiving his teacher, Mahendra Kandali, and his class-mate and family priest, Ramarama Vipra, among the first neophytes.

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The Bhuyans' territories bordered on the lands held by the Tibeto-Burman tribe, Kacharis, who started creating difficulties for these chiefs leading to skirmishes between the two groups. Sankaradeva, who wanted a quiet life for his spiritual activities, migrated with all the Bhuyans to the northern bank of the Brahmaputra and settled finally at a place, Gangamau, near modern Biswanathghat. But the Coches under the leadership of Visvasimha were establishing a Kingdom with Cooch-Behar as its centre, and the Bhuyans in Kamarupa were already feeling the impact of Visvasimha's expansionism. Seeing this, Sankaradeva and his company of Bhuyans moved once again to the east and, entering the Ahom kingdom, made their abode in the river-island of Majuli at a place called Dhuwahat or Belaguri. It was here, on one hand, that Sankaradeva acquired the companionship of a brilliant Kayastha youth, Madhavadeva, later to be his closest disciple and finest apostle, after a very keen debate, for the latter was till then a staunch Sakta, believing that the Primordial Power of the world in the form of a goddess has to be propitiated with many animal sacrifices and, on the other hand, he had a stiff confrontation with other *tantrics* and scholars belonging to various shades of Indian thought. Some of his protagonists of heterodox faiths abused the ears of the Ahom monarch of the land with foul reports about his missionary activities. The saint was summoned to the capital for a trial, but had an honourable acquittal when facts about his faith and philosophy were made known to the king. Nothing daunted, the adversaries tried another trick and raised fears of subversion in the king's mind. The Bhuyans of Dhuwahat were called to an elephant-catching *khedda* operation but, not being used to it, let the elephants escape through the areas of their vigilance. The king ordered arrest of the principal Bhuyans. Sankaradeva somehow escaped, but his son-in-law and Madhavadeva were taken in chains to the capital, Gadgaon. The son-in-law was put to the executioner's sword and Madhavadeva, apparently saintly, was detained there for six months. This greatly embittered the saint's feelings, who on Madhava's return decided to go to the Coch kingdom, because the new king, Naranarayana, and his brother

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and commander-in-chief of the army, Chilaraya, were known to have a love of learning and piety.

Naranarayana and Chilaraya led an inroad into the Ahom kingdom in 1546 A.D. and advanced as far as Narayanpur at a small distance from Dhuwahat. Sankaradeva and others took advantage of this and with the help of some Bhuyans already in the Coch camp sailed down the Brahmaputra in a number of boats. They entered Kamarupa and after staying in several places settled at Barpeta. His life in the Coch State was of comparative quiet. But even here the old priesthood offered hostility to his creed and tried to win over the king against his church. On the other hand, he acquired a great number of disciples here ; and it was to his advantage that Chilaraya married the daughter of his cousin, Ramaraya. Some good people like Narayana Thakura, Damodaradeva and Harideva joined the Order of Sankaradeva.

About 1550 A.D. Sankaradeva took 120 disciples and set out on a second pilgrimage to Puri, coming back home after some six months. An old man now, he devoted his time to holding congregations, receiving neophytes and writing books. Among the new converts the notable were Ananta Kandali, a Brahmin scholar and poet; the chief of Heremda; and a Muslim, Chandsai. The activities of the Vaishnava fraternity increased to such a degree as to cause disquiet in the old priestly circles, which started a campaign of vilification in the capital and elsewhere. Naranarayana was much infuriated to hear the exaggerated and distorted reports about the saint's doings, and sent some policemen to bring down the social rebel in chains. The saint could not be apprehended. Two of his followers, Narayana Thakura and Gokulachanda, were dragged from Barpeta to Cooch-Behar and put to the severest forms of torture in an attempt to extort news about the Master. The two Vaishnavas refused to divulge anything and were, therefore, sold to some Bhutanese traders, who, however, were impressed by their godliness and released them. The two policemen who carried Narayana and Gokulachanda back to the capital became ready converts to the new faith.

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The king sent his men a second time to bind down Sankaradeva. Chilaraya, however, sensed his brother's fury and sent his own men to take his uncle-in-law safe to his own quarters. When Naranarayana pressed on Chilaraya to hand over the religious rebel to him, the latter obtained the assurance from the king that no injury would be done to the person of the saint before the trial was over. Sankaradeva accordingly presented himself at the Coch royal court. His genial personality, his poetical and philosophical disposition coming out in the measure of a few Sanskrit and Assamese verses of his own composition, which he recited with his deep and mellifluent voice, and in the form of the discourse that immediately followed, made a very deep impression on the king who had his early education in Varanasi. Day in and day out, there was a series of religious disputation with the Brahmin scholars of the land who for the most held tantric views ; and each day brought signal triumph for the Vaishnava saint. The result was that Naranarayana became a friend to the saint and remained so till the last and that Sankaradeva had often to shuttle between his temple (*satra*) at Patbausi (Barpeta) and Cooch-Behar. He often stayed with Chilaraya, who built him a temple at Bhela in the capital itself, and inspired him to have a forty-yard-long piece of cloth woven to depict Krishna's life in Vrindavana in colours and to write a drama, *Rama-yipaya,* and produce it with his (Chilaraya's) actors (*nartakas*). This piece of writing is dated 1490 Saka (1568 A.D.). Within a few months of its production the Master passed away on the 7th or 21st Bhadra of the same Saka year and was given a state funeral on the banks of the small river, Torocha.

Sankaradeva was primarily a religious leader and reformer. He found Assam disunited through many creeds and forms. There was no peace in the land as it was divided politically. He himself belonged to the ruling Bhuyan Community, which held various principalities spotting the plains from the north-eastern corner to the modern Cooch-Behar. The different tribes held their own indifferent places, particularly in the hills and in the backwoods. Of the different religions prevalent in the land,

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Saktism was the strongest, and it got mixed up with debased forms of Buddhist *tantricism* to create a turbid atmosphere. The *Kalika-purana,* a 'left-hand' text, ordained *panchamakara,* the *sabarotsava* reeking of frank sensuality, a great variety of blood sacrifices, virgin worship, and other peculiar forms. Some of these extreme rituals were carried on fearlessly in the main centres of *Saktism* like Nilachala (Kamakhya temple) and Sadiya (Tamresvari temple). The sacrifice of animals in their hundreds was revolting to Sankaradeva and his followers like Damodaradeva, and they declared themselves strongly against it. In order to get rid of other unhappy associations of *tantricism*, they decried the worship of Sakti, Siva and other deities whatsoever. In the words of Dr. S. K. Chatterji, "Sankaradeva was successful in applying the salve of religion to a people distracted in mind and body and brought to them spiritual peace and contentment and helped them on their way to having a better organised life." Fortunately for the people, the Ahom power, established in the eastern region early in the 13th century, expanded westward, and the 16th century saw the rise and expansion of the Coch power further west so that the small principalities of Bhuyans and others were subjugated, thus leading to a balance of power between the Ahoms and Coches so that a new Assamese culture, as was evolved by Sankaradeva, could emerge as a cementing principle over north-eastern India with its predominantly Mongoloid population.

The particular form of Vaishnavism evolved by Sankaradeva is known as *ekasarana namadharma* (religion of prayers with the ultimate refuge in one god). It enjoined the worship of one god, that is, Vishnu in his many incarnations, chiefly as Krishna and Rama, and interdicted its votaries from the worship of any other deity, because as the *Bhagavata-purana* urges, it is enough to water the roots of a tree by which the branches and foliage get their sap or give food to the *pranas* by which limbs get their nourishment. Or, as the *Bhagavadgita* demands, one should take sole refuge in the Bhagavat, the Powerful Lord, who saves one from the faults of omission of all other duties, *bhakti* includes

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in its fold eight different forms of *kirtana* (saying praises of the Lord), *sravana* (listening to the praise of the Lord), *archana* or *puja* (worship to an idol with flowers etc.), and so on. But Sankaradeva declared *kirtana* and *sravana* to be the main forms out of these eight, and that is why his religion is called *sravana-kirtana-dharma* or *nama-dharma*. Then again, it is popularly known as *mahapurushiya dharma*, because its worship is of the *mahapurusha* (*parama-purusha* or *purushottama*), the Supreme person, who lords over primal *Prakriti* and *Purusha*, the pro-creators of the world of being. The holy services in the temples (known as *sattra*) are known as *Hari-prasanga* or *nama-prasanga* and these are mostly congregational prayer in songs, recitations, expositions of *sastras* and, sometimes, dramatic pieces. These could be attended by all men (not women though) irrespective of caste distinctions and could be conducted by persons not ranked according to caste. The religious preceptor could also be of a lower social order than the disciple. Thus a sort of social equality was achieved even though the caste order was not done away with.

Sankaradeva and his chief apostle Madhavadeva, composed a large literature, which provides the canonical basis as well as materials for the daily and seasonal temple services. There are songs like *ghosha* (containing a couplet) *bar-gita* (a type of song turned to different melody-modes), *bhatima* (eulogistic song), and *kirtana-ghosha* (sometimes forming part of a long narrative). In some books of Sankara's like *Harischandra-upakhyana*, *Amrita-manthana* and *Balichalana*, stories from the *Bhagavata-purana* and Vaishnavite tales from other *puranas* are retold in simple verses. Sometimes, again, the saint follows the original *Bhagavata* in making a sequence of verses, which may not conform to the set standard of a *khanda-kavya* or narrative. In *Bhakti-pradipa* and *Niminava-siddha-samvada* he expounds the principles of *bhakti*. His Sanskrit treatise, *Bhakti-ratnakara*, on the same themes covers a large field and draws from various *puranas*, works like *Bhagavadgita* and authors like Sankara the *Advaitin*, Krishna Misra Yati and Sihlana Misra.

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He has six dramas *Rukmini-harana, Parijata-harana*, etc., the tradition of the production of which still continues in some *sattras* in its glory. These dramas contain in them a number of well-made Sanskrit verses and a number of songs (*ankiya gita* and *bhatima*) in an artificial idiom created by him for the plays and *bar-gitas*. His writings still reign supreme among devout people, and his songs are ever on their lips.

Sankaradeva bequeathed a very rich legacy of classical tradition in music and dancing to his people. His dance-dramas make a community with such heritages as *bhagavata-mela* and *Yakshagana* of the South and *Rama Lila* and *Rasa Lila* of the North. Much of this tradition has withered away for want of proper culture, but a good deal of its beauty still persists. The Vaishnava culture of Assam also nurtured the growth of a school of painting in Assam.

The philosophical basis of Sankaradeva's Vaishnavism is vedantic. His vedantic views have a large monistic bias thus making up a peculiar religious mysticism.

To conclude, I would like to quote from my work *Sankaradeva and His Times* (Gauhati University 1965) :

"Sankaradeva's benign influence has been felt for the last few centuries in all fields of the cultural life of the Assamese people. Thousands of devotees still visualize to themselves every day the physical beauty of the Master in its resplendent and almost transcendent glory, as has been painted by his dearest follower, Madhava.

"Equal to Sankara's physical strength and beauty was his intellectual stamina and excellence. A versatile genius, he combined in himself many wonderful qualities. He was an administrator (as a *siromani bhuyan*) and later a *gomasta* under Coch regime and social reformer, poet and dramatist, painter, musician and actor in dance-dramas. Wide and deep

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was his reading, and firm and persistent his intellectual grasp. In religious disputations he pushed his antagonists with sincere and persuasive arguments to the defeated corner. He often worked up the citations put forward by the opponents to his own advantage and made them move of themselves to his conclusions. His organizing capacity manifested itself in the way he placed the doctrines of his faith on a firm soil in the teeth of the bitterest opposition. Although he was 'a menace to the heretics' as Madhava has described him, his was a charming personality which attracted and pleased those who were near him. A householder, he resigned himself and his all to God, and remained detached from the pleasures and pains of the world. His weal and his woe depended on that of his followers. The culture of *bhakti* among his disciples in the proper manner was his delight. Always busy with the writing of books and the holding of discourses on religion and philosophy, he was not devoid of humour, which often broke forth in the course of his narratives, dramatic works and in common talk.

"Sankara brought home the message of the religion of love to the people, released the soul of the common man from the oppressive burden of sacerdotalism and indicated to the individual that his voice could be heard by God if only it rose from a pure and sincere heart. His religious activities formed the basis for the growth of a culture and a literature, both rich and varied. The common man in the backwoods of the valley or on the hills could now embrace a simplified and democratized Hinduism without his having to be looked down upon by the 'high' castes. The new faith had to struggle against *tantricism* in its varied and sometimes horrid forms, and it gained sufficient ground within the very life-time of Sankara.

"The great Sankaradeva movement thus brought about a new and comprehensive outlook on life and a distinctly healthy tone to social behaviour. It accelerated the pace of a renascence of literature and fine arts like music and painting. The dignity of the individual endeavour of man as a distinct religious being

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and not as 'the thrall of theological despotism' was declared. Assam discovered herself as an integral part of the holy land of Bharatavarsha, and gloried in that discovery. The holy books in Sanskrit, the *litterae humaniores* of India, could no longer be sealed to the common man's view by a rigid oligarchy. The use of the local language in expositions of theology and philosophy was in itself a challenge to the erstwhile guardians of secret doctrines, who understood the significance of the challenge and 'protested very much'. The new humanism eyed askance at the numerous blood sacrifices, including the immolation of man, and the nice sacerdotalism that was the order of the day in Hindu society. The use of Assamese, an Indo-Aryan tongue, which formed but an island in a Tibeto-Burman ocean as the medium for the propagation of the neo-Vaishnava faith led to its emergence as the language of all the people. The ancient kingdom of Kamarupa was now undergoing a huge change, and it was having almost a regeneration, political and social, which timed well with the cultural resurgence initiated by Sankaradeva ; and the first possibilities of a unified and modern Assam was now in evidence."

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GURU NANAK

Gopal Singh

When one speaks of Guru Nanak, one speaks not so much of Nanak the man, as of Nanak the idea—an idea that did not remain an abstraction. When Nanak came on the scene in 1469 A.D., most of the north, east and south India had passed under the Muslims, mostly Afghans, from the north-west. Persian had replaced Sanskrit and a new hybrid language of intercourse between the invaders and the indigenous populace, called Urdu, was being evolved first in Punjab, and then in and around Delhi. In the days of Nanak, Babur, the Moghul, invaded India four times and finally settled on the throne of Delhi in 1526 A.D. Hinduism had lost its earlier Vedic moorings; there was no more the exuberance and joys of earthly life for which the gods were propitiated. Although the philosophy visualised in the Upanishads, of man's relations with the universe, is generally accepted as an example of man's most profound introspection, Hinduism had now become more a matter of outer ritual than inner experience. Women had been utterly down-graded. Caste had so much divided and disintegrated our race that when over a hundred years after Nanak, Shivaji, the great Maratha hero, wanted to be crowned a Hindu king, no Brahmin was prepared to anoint him ! Sanskrit, the language of the olympian gods, had become the exclusive preserve of the high-caste Brahmins; and the Sudras including all women and almost all those who worked for a living, were denied the privilege of reading the Vedas or studying the language of gods in which it was written or revealed.

At first the Muslim invaders took no account of the sensibilities of the inhabitants. This is how an empire could be enlarged and consolidated, though Muslim devout, notably from

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Persia, gradually incorporated the most general Hindu view of reality in the doctrines of Islam. And, Sufism through its all-inclusive outlook gained many adherents to the democratic and dynamic faith of Islam.

Meanwhile, a new wave of assertion in our age-old values of the spirit had sprung with the emergence of Kabir, Ravidas, Tukaram and Namdeva, Mira Bai, Dadu, Chaitanya, and long before them the Nayanmar and Alwar Saints of the south, emphasising that not caste, not even creed, determined one's relation with the one God of the whole Universe, that no language was sacred but that which came from the heart; and much soul-stirring and sensitive poetry in various Indian languages had resulted alongwith the new movement of *bhakti,* the loving-adoration of God through his incarnations. But little secular hope was offered to the subject peoples of Hindustan : for the world, even according to the *bhaktas,* was *maya,* an-illusion or a delusion, a passing show and hence not worthy of a serious man's attention. But Nanak was different. He not only gave men the message of spiritual fulfilment, but also of earthly hope. He not only decried caste, but established out-castes alongwith others as his new messengers of hope : Mardana, the Muslim drummer ; Sajjan, a Muslim Sheikh and once a thug and a cut-throat; Lalo and Jhanda, the carpenters; Sivanabha of Ceylon, the king, and Chatur Das of Banaras, the Brahmin. Born in Punjab, in 1469 A.D., married, with two sons, he left his home probably at the age of twenty, and for forty years, he trudged on foot, visiting not only the four corners of India, but also Ceylon, Tibet and Ladakh, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, Mesopotamia and several other famous centres of Hindu, Buddhist and Muslim cultures. And, wherever he went, he challenged superstition, formalism in religion, caste-consciousness, separateness or superiority born of creed, sex or colour, and awakened men to their inner self which, indeed, had emanated from a Universal Self. "That what is in macrocosm is also in macrocosm and he who searcheth, findeth too". For this, it was not necessary to deny the world, but to engage actively in honest secular activity, not only to earn one's

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bread, but to have the privilege of sharing it, and this not to pamper one's ego or to earn other men's favour or gratitude, but as an offering to the Divine within us and beyond. The merit of a devoted life was not merely in the hereafter, but *here* and *now*. For, what yesterday was our past has become our present with the rise of the new sun and on this, indeed, also centres our future, for what we are today will determine what we shall tomorrow be:

"Why blameth thou others, blame thy deeds.
For thou receiveth the fruit of what thou soweth."

Thus, although Nanak accepts the validity of the Hindu view of *Karma* leading to transmigration, and the end of life being the attainment of *Nirvana* or *Moksha,* he entirely transforms the meaning of these terms. This human birth is not a punishment for our sins committed in the unknown past, but a reward for our piety and holiness and a stage in man's evolution from which there's only but one higher state, that of the super-man, of an angel's, not Nietzsche's man of power to overpower others. Hell is here and also heaven: "In ego", says Nanak, "does one experience heaven or hell." "O father, my coming and going have ended. The fire (of desire) that burnt within me is cooled with the nectar of Thy name."

The man is not born in sin, nor the world is false, even though transitory, it is the abode of the True one. "Precious is the human birth", says Nanak, "only those turned Godwards attain it." Again, says he, "Implementing His name within us, God made our body the expression of His Law."

"True are Thy worlds, True Thy Universes", he avers, though "false are the kings and those that subject themselves to their authority, and also they who come here merely to go out, build castles of dust but not hearts of men". Says Nanak :

"Wondrous are sounds and sights, and the wisdom of men, and the distinctions they cultivate, and even their separate ways ; wondrous are those who walk on Thy path and also those who are strayed away. God,

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I'm wonderstruck on seeing all Thy wonders". So that, according to Nanak, there's nothing inherently sinful. "Whom shall I call bad when there is not another without Thee?" proclaims he.

But, still there is sin and pain in the world. "The world was created for the Saint", says Kabir, "but thieves have taken it over, though the earth mindeth not their weight and even bringeth them profit." Nanak went even one step further. Not only did he court imprisonment at the hands of Babur, but uttered some of his most patriotic verses at this time, full of not only anguish, but an appeal to act and rebel :

> "Nanak ! now is the time to sing the wedding-song of death, and annoint our foreheads not with saffron, but with blood".

"Pain is the cure; pleasures are the malady", proclaimed he. Sacrifice and suffering he offered as a medicament for the state into which his countrymen had fallen. Was the God of men, who, according to Nanak, is both the source of good and evil, to blame for this ? In a way, yes, but only partly so. "For he whom the God wishes to waste away, He takes away first his goodness". "But, it is given to man," says Nanak, "to restore that goodness in him, by attuning himself to his God, through constant remembrance of Him, with loving adoration, like a wedded woman cherisheth her spouse even though separated by distance, though never in time."

This one remarkable feature in Nanak's message transformed the whole society wherever his holy name travelled; that the body, the temple of the God of Truth, was to be yoked to find out and attune ourselves to this Truth, not merely for the sake of individual salvation, but for uplifting a whole corporate society.

"Nanak, he who's redeemed redeemeth others too by his presence". And redemption comes through the discipline of a type of what Aurobindo had lately termed "Integral yoga", which is a combination of the *Bhaktiyoga, Karmayoga* and *Jnana*

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yoga—but not of *Hatha yoga,* or burning away of the body which Nanak rejects out of hand.

With his rise arises also a galaxy of saints, warriors, poets and musicians, artists and men dedicated to the service of others, irrespective of caste or community, and a new socio-spiritual order comes into being which gathers high and low (more low than high), Hindu and Mohammedan, the Aryan and the Semitic on a single platform, and ultimately welds them into a formidable social force.

That Nanak, disinheriting his sons, could find a successor as worthy of him as Angad and that this could continue for two centuries and more, is another tribute to his insight into the character of men and his power to re-shape and re-build them after his own image. Everyone of them was not only an awakened soul, but a man of action ever-ready to do or die, and oftentimes a poet and a philosopher, if not also a builder and organiser of cities and commerce and peoples.

Nanak, as is well-known, was a poet par excellence. He writes in a language which is not often Punjabi, as it is now understood, but in a mixed language, which for want of a better name, we may call *Sadhu Bhasha* understood then as now all over India. His sentiment is essentially Indian: and never for once does he so much as mention the name of Punjab in his extensive writings. He accepts the basic tenets of the Indian view of life—self-surrender against self-assertion, idealism against mere existentialism ; a democratic spiritual temper so as not only to tolerate, but also appreciate and, if possible, integrate another's point of view; spiritualism against materialism (though the line of Nanak emphasises over and over again that the spirit and the matter have emanated from and submerge in the same source).

"Nanak, the subtle and the apparent are, indeed, identical", says Guru Arjan, which is a revolutionary doctrine though

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today in the age of modern science, it seems so natural and so true.

But, what distinguishes him from the run of other poets is that Nanak is less metaphysical and more mystic, more lyrical and less discursive or didactic; more personal than formal.....

Nanak employs speech-rhythms extensively in his poetry and not the conventional metres, many of which he uses and yet subtly transforms to conform to the mood and the sentiment and the feeling than to the set patterns of Hindi prosody. He experiments with free verse and blank verse. And so many variations does he introduce into the age-old measures that it is well-nigh impossible to designate them, even if all these could be delineated through laborious research. And that is what he does also with his words. He uses them for their inner meaning, their feel, their sound correspondence with the prevailing mood rather than their accepted notations as found in a lexicon. That is how I feel that he is, more than any other poet of modern India, the harbinger of a new freedom in the style of poesy.

So also with his subject matter. His main theme and its treatment is so modern. For, when asked about the origin of the Universe, he said, "When one thinks of the beginning, one is lost in a sense of wonder". He calls the world egg-shaped, visualises a time when there was chaos upon chaos and God alone was seated in His absolute Trance, when there was no sin and no virtue, no heaven or hell, no earth or sky, wind nor fire. And when and how it pleased Him, He caused the Universe to come into being, not only the Universe of men, but also many other universes.

"There are myriads of the underworlds and the skies", he says, "but they are all strung upon the One alone and obey fixed laws, ever the same for everyone in all ages and climes. The age of the world and man is known to Him alone who caused them. For us, it is a mystery. And He created them for His play, for expressing His power, His virtues and His grace. All that He had to give man he hath given and only if

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he knew how to harness and distribute it, he it is who'd say, "Enough, no more !"

"What is the nature of this God—the creator and the destroyer of all, the giver of pain and pleasure, to whom if one's self attuneth, he asketh for nought but for Him alone ?" Says Nanak, "I know not how to describe Him, for He can be compared to Himself alone. So I submit to Him, O God, Thou art what only *Thou* art."

It is not for any reward in the hereafter that one becomes His devotee. "The wise one," says Nanak, "abandons even the desire to be emancipated". For, emancipation, according to Nanak, is not to be released into the emptiness of the void, but into the rythms of love. And who is it that has ever loved and also craved for release ? Loving itself is emancipation.

When they considered young Nanak to be ailing, for he had refused to farm or keep a shop, they called in a physician who felt Nanak's pulse. Nanak smiled and said to the wise one :

"My one malady is that I'm separated from myself,
And the other that I crave to be what I should be.
And the third that I'm in the eye of the all-powerful death
And, then, there's pain to suffer, and man cometh only to pass away
O physician, which of these maladies will you cure, O, which, indeed ?"

And when his father and mother asked him to do as he was bidden for their pleasure, he answered :

"I know not who's my father or mother, and whence I came
And why fire and water have blended to make of me what I am

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Within me there's something that gnaws
at my heart,
And sayeth : thou shalt be at peace only if thou
submiteth to the Will of thy Lord".

When Nanak went out to preach his gospel, the first message he gave was : "There's no Muslim and no Hindu". As for himself, he proclaimed : "I am a mere man made up of five elements." When asked, who was a true Muslim, he said, "He who sayeth the five prayers : of truth, of honest living, of invoking the Grace of Allah, of clean and humble mind, and of the remembrance of God". When asked to wear the sacred thread like a devout Hindu, he said :

"If compassion be the cotton, contentment be the thread, and of continence the knot, and of truth the twist, then this thread would burn not, nor be soiled and keep one's company both here and in the yond".

When asked who he was, he would say : "I'm lowest of the low. For God's Grace is only where the lowly and the lost are cared for".

At Puri, they were performing the *Arti,* going round and round the idol of Lord Jagannath with earthen lamps and incense and flowers and the beating of cymbals and drums. Said the Guru :

"When in the salvar of the sky, the lamps of the sun and the moon and the stars, studded like jewels, pay homage to His magnificence, and the winds wave fragrance to Him of all the mountains, and all the woods are in bloom to shower flowers on the path of His chariot, and the Unstruck Melody of the Word ringeth through space, how can we pay homage to Him with our small minds and rituals—yea, Him who's seen and yet not seen, who hath a myriad eyes, and yet no eyes, and who can only be experienced and never described".

It is said, Rabindra Nath Tagore's father Maharshi Debendra

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Nath when he heard this *Arti* being sung at the Golden Temple at Amritsar came in ecstacy and started dancing with joy. "Wonder, O Wonder", he is reported to have said, "My God is a wonder"

Many miracles have been attributed to Nanak, but he always disclaimed any miraculous powers and even denounced them. "Without the power of the God's word, I have no other miracle to show. With it, I make angels of men. Even if I flew in the air and ate iron or lived buried in the snows, of what account is this to man or my God ?"

"If water thrown towards the East at Haridwar could reach the high heavens why couldn't his reach the Punjab towards the West ?" he asked in all innocence. At Mecca, he spread his feet towards the holy Kaaba, the Muslim house of God. When reprimanded, he said, "Turn my feet to whichever side God is not." He was asked why he had cooked fish on the day of the solar eclipse at Kurukshetra, the Guru replied : "Is water not life ? Is vegetation not life ? Is a woman with whom you deal each day not flesh ?" About food and drinks he enjoined : "Only that food, that joy, is vain that aileth the body or bringeth to the mind the thought of sin".

When he saw the professional dancers performing Krishna-Lila not to express their devotion, but to collect coins by amusing their audience, he put them to shame, saying :

> "Do not the oil-presses dance ? and the spinning wheels ?
> And the hand-mills ? and the potters' wheels,
> And the incessant whirlwinds in the deserts ?
> And the tops and the churning-sticks ?
> And the threshers and the birds whose flying knows no rest ?"

When asked how one is to light one's lamp of wisdom, he answered : "By outgrowing one's knowledge". Asked who is a Yogi, he said, "He who looketh upon all men alike". Asked who of the two was greater, Hindu or Muslim, he answered :—

> "He who doeth more good to others".

Of the nine *rasas* or moods, into which Indian literary tradi-

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tion has categorised the flavour of the aesthetic enjoyment of poetry, there is not one in which Nanak's poetry does not excel—*Sringar* or *Santa, Karuna* or *Raudra,* or *Bhayanak, Adbhuta* or *Vira, Hasya* or *Bibhatsa.* But nowhere is the expression of joy exuberant, nor of sadness unalloyed. It is mellowed, seasoned wood out of which the words and moods are carved. The sentiment and the mood is always spontaneous, intimate and heart-felt and the words and images which echo them are equally so. The transitoriness of life, and man's indulgence to the detriment of his inner growth is expressed not in words but in feeling :

O black deer, hear thou, why are thou
attached to the beauty of the garden ?
The fruit of Vice is sweet for a day,
and when it giveth pain.
The world is like a sea-wave, like
lightning's flash,
It cometh and it goeth.....
Nanak speaketh the Truth, dwell thou
On thy Lord in the mind, for tomorrow
though dieth, O black deer.
O black bee, thou that hoppeth
from flower to flower,
O my stranger soul, thou that
art involved in strife.....
O fish, separated (from the sea)
with a tear staying
still in thy eyes.....
O split stream, thy Union is rare
with thy source !

Nanak is very aesthetic in the delineation both of his objective, the unitive experience of God, and the Path that leads to it. "My God", he says, "is ever-fresh, ever-new, ever-beneficent". Then what is he like ? "Of beauteous eyes, sparkling teeth, a sharp nose and luxurious hair, of golden body and alluring gait, of steps like a peacock's, of ever-flowing youth, whose speech is ever sweet and full of melody like a *koel's** in a mango-grove !"

*Cuckoo

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Again, he compares the soul of the seeker to a young bride, drunk with her beauty, of sharp features whom the beloved also seeks to enjoy.

And when there's the meeting of the two, one's within is lost in ecstacy and wonder.

That's why the symbol of the bride and the groom is repeated over and over again to express the pain of separation, the ever-fresh joy of intimacy, the spontaneity of self-surrender and the cool comfort of the seeker being also the sought-after.

And the world and all the elements like the God who created them are a sheer wonder :

"The earth is studded with six jewels, where one is sent out to love". The God is like "a tree in fruit, of deep and cool shade, ever-green, whose sap giveth eternal life. If it is a forest, it is of the fragrant sandal-wood, even though girt by snakes. Blessed, blessed, are my beauteous doors through which entereth my love, and I'm cooled".

Says Nanak :

> God is like a beauteous temple studded with rubies and jewels and pearls and pure diamonds. He's the enticing fortress of Gold. No, no, my God is not in the books, neither the Veda nor the semitic texts. There's nothing like unto Him in the world. But, lo, my king is here before me, for, verily, He's a presence !

What is good ? That which pleaseth my God. Where is God ? Where one's heart is. What is Truth ? That which goeth not and is valid wherever and by whomsoever tested. What is beauty ? Which makes one lose oneself in its ecstacy and wonder and stayeth whole and forever.

For Nanak, Truth is not an abstraction, nor beauty nor goodness. It is live and active and is seen, felt and experienced. Says he, "Truth is above everything : but higher still is the living of Truth". It is only by emptying our within of our

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self, that we enter into the realm of Truth, but this self-surrender should be in-born and heart-felt. "For, do not the hunters of deer also bow down ?" Says Nanak : "A sinner, indeed, boweth down twice as much as a lover !" "What is worship ? It is not a formalistic ritual but a hearty self-denial. Whatever the God-conscious being doeth, is worship".

How is one to keep detached in the midst of the world ? "Like the Lotus, his roots in mud, but his flower above the surface of the water ; like the duck in a stream ; in it, but not of it". How is one to love ? "Like water loveth the milk. The heat it suffereth upon itself, but the milk it alloweth not to burn !"

Guru Nanak in his style is so pithy and intense, so universal and direct that his words have entered into our folklore. There is no verse of his which does not contain one or two enunciations of Truth with the discipline, spontaneity of utterance and meaningfulness of a proverb. A few examples will suffice :

Truth is never too old
Heaven is attained not through words, but through the practice of Truth
He who loseth God loseth himself
What kind of wisdom is this that nourishes within us ego or greed ?
What kind of love is this which maketh us not fear-free of the Beloved ?
He who conquers himself conquers the whole world
Not through knowledge one knoweth, but through seeing.
Pain and pleasure are the two garments that one wears.
Dust returns to dust, the air blendeth with the air.
O, who is it, then that dieth ?
What shall I do in the forest, when the spring is here within me ?
Nanak, each one that I have seen is in pain, except the one who's awakened like the Guru.

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It is said, Swami Ramakrishna Parmahansa used to deliver his entire message in six words : "Make one your mind and tongue". Guru Nanak went further and said, "Utter what you think and feel, and also, act upon it".

Think and feel, and then act, and do not have either two hearts, or two minds, nor two faces ; but whatever you think or do, should not be for self-glory or greed, but for the good of another, less fortunate but perhaps more deserving.

For, Nanak never used the word "I" in his entire writings, except in a mood of self-surrender. It was always *you, he* and *Him,* never *I, me* and *mine.* In humility, that is born of self-confidence and thus is natural and spontaneous, there are very few to compare with Guru Nanak. For him, there were no final truth except those that answered the questioning of man through the ages. And so, he never considered himself either the final messenger of God or an exclusive one.

"O God, the world is on fire.
Save it, O save it through whichever door he cometh unto you".

It is rare indeed to hear such a democratic voice in the world of religion.

After Nanak, his work was carried on by his nine successors, till the tenth and the last, Guru Gobind Singh, on his death in 1708 A.D., abolished succession and called on his followers to look upon the holy book—the *Granth Sahib*—the eternal *Guru.*

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CHANDIDAS

Chintaharan Chakravarti

Chandidas is one of the greatest—if not the greatest—Vaishnava poets of Bengal. He flourished some time before the Vaishnava reformer, Shri Chaitanya, who, it is stated, listened to and relished his poems along with those of Jayadev and Vidyapati. It seems he had already made his name and gained some popularity by the time of Chaitanya (1486—1533). His popularity has grown with years. He is held in high esteem not only by Vaishnava devotees but also by all lovers of literature.

Though hardly any authentic information is available about the life of the poet, there are two separate traditions which associate him with two villages, one Chhatna near Bankura, and the other Nanur in the district Birbhum. In the first village there is an old temple dedicated in 1476 Saka to Vasuli, the tutelary deity of the poet, mentioned in his *Krishna-Kirtana.* Historically uncorroborated stories are current about his platonic love for a washerwoman, Tara, Ramatara or Rami by name. She was his comrade in *rasa sadhana* or *parakiya sadhana* (worship in the company of a woman not being one's wife). "The love of the washerwoman", it is declared, "is tested gold. There is no trace of sexual lust in it".

Another love story is associated with him. It is said that the sweet melody of his songs attracted the wife of a Nawab and engendered in her a deep love for the poet. This brought down on him the wrath of the Nawab leading to his untimely and unusual death caused by royal manouvering or decree. Our poet is stated to have had a meeting with the celebrated poet of Mithila (North Bihar), Vidyapati.

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The poetic output of Chandidas consists of numerous songs dealing with the divine amours of Lord Krishna and Radha. These are found scattered in different anthologies of Vaishnava poems. Occasionally, however, the anthologies differ in naming the authors of the poems, one giving one name, another giving a different one. There is also a good deal of difference in the literary quality of the poems passing under the name of Chandidas. The name is often found to occur with different epithets in different places, e.g., *Vadu, Dvija* and *Dina*. This may be an indication to show that more than one poet passed under the same name, Chandidas, occasionally distinguished by varying epithets.

Attempts have been made to salvage the poems of the original Chandidas who was highly appreciated by Chaitanya. But these attempts have been able to please few people, especially the orthodox followers of Vaishnavism who are not prepared to discard as spurious any familiar poems ascribed to Chandidas. Neither are they ready to accept as genuine or near genuine the poems with erotic tones and quaint language contained in an old manuscript discovered about fifty years ago and published under the title of *Sri Krishna Kirtana,* a title suggested by the editor in the absence of any in the incomplete manuscript. This discovery has however been acclaimed by a number of reputed scholars and linguists as a landmark in the study of medieval Bengali language and literature. It is supposed to preserve the characteristics of the language of the time of the great Chandidas or near about. It is undoubtedly beautiful poetic composition consisting of songs in the form of dialogues between Krishna, Radha and her old mother. In its different sections, it describes different incidents in the lives of Krishna and Radha based on the *Puranas* or folk literature. The songs usually give the name of the author as Vadu Chandidas.

A simple and attractive style, free from artificial embelishments, seems to be a characteristic that marks out the poems of the great poet.

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Here is a vivid description of love-lorn Radha, the consort of Krishna, smarting under the pangs of separation.

"What pains Radha has within herself ! She sits in a solitary place and remains alone. She listens to nobody's words. She is always in deep thought, she gazes on the cloud; her eye-balls do not move. She refrains from taking food, wears a red piece of cloth: she is like the *Yogini* (a female mendicant). She unties her braid of hair interspersed with flowers and looks on her dishevelled hairs. With a smiling face she fixes her eyes on the cloud, speaks something with raised hands, she looks with a fixed gaze on the necks of the peacock and the peahen. This is the new acquaintance between the dark-hued Krishna, and his lady love", says Chandidas.

The enchanting sound of the flute of Krishna completely unnerves Radha, who bursts forth : "Who is it that plays the flute on the bank of the Yamuna ? Who is it that plays the flute here in the pasture fields of Gokula ? My body is unnerved ; my mind is restless. My cooking is disturbed (made topsyturvy) at the sound of the flute. Who is the person, who sounds the flute ? I shall surrender myself at his feet as his servant. Who is it that plays the flute at his pleasure ? What fault have I committed at his feet ? Tears flow incessantly from my eyes; my heart fails at the sound of the flute. The son of Nanda plays the sweet flute to make my mind restless ! I am not a bird to be able to fly to him. Let the earth burst so that I may enter there to hide myself. All people know that fire burns forests. My mind burns like the kiln of the potter (without anybody knowing it)."

Radha deeply in love with Krishna completely surrenders herself to his mercy with this fervent appeal :

"O ! friend, what more shall I say? You be the master of my heart in all my births, in my life and in my death. Fastening the noose of love between those two feet of yours and my heart, I surrender everything: body, mind and heart and become thy slave. Who else is there (to be regarded) my own in this

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family or that ? Before whom should I weep ? There is none to enquire about Radha, I realise ; whom should I call my own in these three worlds ? I take recourse to your two lotus-like feet as being cool. Don't discard me, a guileless woman, under some pretext. Do as you consider proper. I thought over and find there is no one that is my own except you, my friend. I cannot keep you out of my sight for a moment, lest I should die. Here is a touch-stone", says Chandidas, "hold it on to your heart".

These poems along with many other similar ones of this poet and those of many other Vaishnava poets are held in high esteem by Vaishnava devotees, not exactly for their literary grace but for their deep religious fervour. They are generally sung in solo followed by a chorus before gatherings of devotees. The songs are often interspersed with elucidatory lines or words known as *akharas* added by eminent singers and handed down to and followed by successive generations. The songs are classified under different sections (*palas*) based on the various phases of the lives of Radha and Krishna with special reference to their love.

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ARUNAGIRINATHA

N. S. Ramachandran

In the galaxy of India's saint-singers, Arunagirinatha stands out a star of the first magnitude. Nearly six centuries have passed since he came as a messenger of God and propagated his gospel of *bhakti* (devotion) and self-realisation but his songs are still a vibrant force which includes within its span the two mighty streams of culture and thought, religious evolution and philosophical enquiry conveyed through the two great and ancient languages, Sanskrit and Tamil, which together constitute the quintessence of the Indian heritage. This gives a pointed and unique significance to the works of Arunagirinatha especially in the context of the synthesis and integration of the various motivating forces which are considered to be vital for establishing a closer and dynamic unity, bringing together the diverse elements constituting the total personality of our nation for its free and full development. This is achieved by Arunagirinatha in two ways. Skanda, known as Kumara or Subrahmanya was his *Ishta-devata* or chosen Deity. The cult of Kumara goes back to Vedic times. The worship of Skanda is prescribed in the *Yagnyavalkya Smriti* and *Apastambha grihya sutras;* it prevailed all over North India from the pre-Christian centuries and during the time of the Epics. Sri Sankaracharya included it as Kaumaram in the Shanmatas or six modes of the worship of the Supreme Being in the forms of Ganapati, Kumara, Ambika, Mahesvara, Vishnu and Surya, which he enunciated and set on a firm foundation. In the South, the worship of Kumara assumed vast proportions from the earliest times. Kumara or Muruka as He is known in Tamil meaning the eternally young and charming God, has a most intimate appeal to the heart of the Tamilian and strikes a responsive chord in the innermost recesses of his being. Arunagirinatha brought about a real union of hearts among different

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sections of the people, imperceptibly and with remarkable catholicity, through his adoration of Skanda and his adoption of Tamil, which he blended beautifully with Sanskrit and made the medium of his expression thereby giving a further impetus to the process of harmonisation.

The available biographical data pertaining to Arunagirinatha are rather meagre and the sources of information are traditional accounts and epigraphical and literary evidence which have been the subject of research from the beginning of this century. The story of the saint's life according to tradition abounds, as usual, in legends, supernatural events and what may be termed as apocryphal narratives. The details of his birth and up-bringing in his childhood and youth are not known with any definiteness. However, according to tradition, Tiruvannamalai, the famous pilgrim-centre with the shrines of Arunachala Siva in the form of *Jyotirlinga* in the North Arcot district of Tamil Nadu, is believed to be his birthplace. He seems to have been born in a well-to-do family (of dancers attached to the temple, according to some) and to have received a sound education in the liberal arts and in Sanskrit and Tamil literature. He developed into a *Asu Kavi,* a poet who could compose verses extempore. He is said to have been addicted to worldly pleasures in his youth and having run through his fortune, and with his health shattered , he was filled with the utmost despair and gloom. At this stage the tide began to turn and an aged ascetic, who is thought to be Arunachaleswara Himself, came before him and asked him to pray to God for His grace. Finding his intense prayers unanswered Arunagirinatha himself, came before him and asked him to pray to God for His grace. Finding his intense prayers unanswered Arunagirinatha wanted to put an end to his life and jumped down from the top of the Northern *gopura* (tower) of the Arunachaleswara temple, when Kumara in all His glory appeared and rescued him with his own hands. The place of this incident is shown in this temple to this day. Arunagiri was overwhelmed with joy and he felt a veil had been torn asunder from his eyes when the Lord wrote on his tongue the *Shadakshari mantra* with his lance or *Vel* or

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Sakti and commanded him to sing His praises. Arunagiri hesitated as he fell bewildered in the divine presence. Kumara, in His infinite mercy, gave his devotee the opening words *Muttaittaru Pattittirunkai* and thus emerged the first of the hymns, collectively known as *Tiruppuhazh* or the 'Glorious praise of the Lord', which thenceforward flowed from him in a flood of blissful song and poetry.

But history, epigraphy and literature have a different story to tell. The genealogy and date of Arunagirinatha would appear to have been placed on firmer ground in the light of the research on this subject conducted by several scholars based on two inscriptions in the village Mullundrum near Tiruvannamalai, literary works like the *Subhadra-Dhananjaya Nataka* of Ramakavi, the *Somavalli-Yogananda Prahasana* of Arunagirinatha, the *Saluvabhyudayam* and *Achyutarayabhyudayam* of Rajanatha Dindima, and the chronicle entitled *Vibhaga-patramala* pertaining to the family of Arunagiri. According to these sources and studies based on them, there is reason to believe that Arunagirinatha was born in the village Mullundrum known as Praudhadevarayapuram and that he came of a Gauda Brahmin stock which had long ago emigrated from the village Varendra in the Rajshahi district (now in Bangladesh) and settled in these parts under royal patronage. It was usual for the male children of those families to be named after the Deity of the shrine of Tiruvannamalai and the annals of the Mullundrum family, which could be traced as far back as the 11th century A. D., are distinguished by a long line of eminent scholars and poets. The latter were known by the general name "Dindima Kavi", as they were privileged to have the *dindima* (a type of drum) played when they appeared in public. In his *Saluvabhyadayam,* Rajanatha of this line describes his father Arunagirinatha as *Dindimakavi Sarvabhauma, Ashtabhasha Parameśvara* and a master of *Chitrakavi-prabandha* who was given first honour as *Prathamaradhya* by the Chera, Chola and Pandya kings. This Arunagirinatha is identified as the saint-singer in view of references in several of his *Tiruppuhazh* songs to himself as a *Chitrakavi* adept in *Chandappa* songs in diverse metrical pattern, honoured all over the country by the ruling

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princes and the people. It is considered that he must have lived during the reign of Praudha Pratapa Devaraya II, Emperor of Vijaynagar (1422—1449 A.D.) and not later than the first decade of the rulership of his son Mallikarjuna Praudha Devaraya, whose inscriptions cover the period between 1450 and 1488 A.D.[1]

It is clear from the words of Arunagirinatha himself that he was held in high esteem by Praudha Devaraya. According to the traditional account the affection and reverence shown to the saint by the Emperor aroused the jealousy of Sambandan, a worshipper of Sakti, attached to the court. The latter declared that he would get his *Devata* to appear before those assembled in the presence of the ruler and challenged Arunagirinatha to do the same with his own *upasana murthy*. Arunagiri sang the *Devendra Sanga Vakuppu* so that Devi did not manifest herself in response to Sambandan and then he invoked Kumara through the song *Atala Sadanarada* saying,

Mayilum Ada Niyadi varavenum
Udayadama marbana Praudha deva Marayan
Ukamumada Vazhdevar Perumale

"Lord, you must come dancing, your peacock and all the gods and goddesses dancing with you..... The heart of Praudha Deva Maharajah also dances in adoration". Sri Subrahmanya came before them in a resplendent vision for a moment and disappeared.

It is also said that subsequently Arunagirinatha defeated Villiputturar, the renowned author of the *Mahabharata* in Tamil in a literary contest. Villiputturar could not interpret the 54th verse of *Kandar Antadi* sung on the occasion by the saint, as it was made up entirely of varieties of *Tavarga* letters.

The verse is as follows :

Titattattat tittat tititatai tatatut tittattita
Titattattat titta tititttitte tetuttu tittitatta
Titattattat Tittattai tatate tatutai tatatattu
Titattattat tittitti titi tititute titottata

[1]. As the subject is Arunagirinatha as a saint-singer in Tamil, his contribution to Sanskrit literature is not dealt with here.

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Arunagirinatha explained the meaning himself and rid the poet of his pride.

The northern tower of the great temple of Arunachaleswara at Tirivannamalai was the spot where Arunagiri attained illumination. The Lord gave him a *japalmala* (rosary) and bade him sing His Praise (*Tiruppugazh*) in "Sweet Tamil" and worship His divine form at various shrines all over the land. Thus began the pilgrimage of Arunagirinatha, covering the six *Padaiveadus*, or principal centres of worship sacred to Subrahmanya, viz., Tiruparankunram, Tiruchendur, Tiruvavinankudi-Palani, Tiruverapkam, Kunrutoradal (all hills) and Pazhamudir Solai (Azhakar-Koil), and extending over every region in South India, besides Tirukkonamalai, Arukkonamalai and Kadir Kamam in the island of Sri Lanka, spreading his message of devotion to God through his immortal songs. He followed the routes taken long ago by the four Saiva Samayacharyas, Tirujnanasambandar. Tirunavakkarasar, Sundarar and Manikka-vachakar and also visited other holy places enriching them with song-offerings. There are hymns by him pertaining to Shri Kailasa, Mayapuri, Kasi and Srisailam (in Andhra Pradesh), in addition to the *Pancha Bhuta Sthalas* of the south where Siva is worshipped as embodied in the five elements—Kanchi (Earth), Tiruvanikka (Water), Arunchala (Fire), Kalahasti (Air) and Chidambaram (Ether). His fame had spread all over the country. He says :

> " *Guha Purva*
> *Paschima Dakshina Uttara Dikkula*
> *Bhaktarka larpuda menavodum*"
> "*Anugraha maravene* (*Tiruppugazh "Bhaktargana"*)
>
> O Guha, the devotees in the east, west, north and south hail these songs as marvellous.....
>
> "*Apatanun miha prasidahi petrrini dulakezhum*
> *Yanaka nama Arputat tiruppugazh.*
> *Tenura vodi....*" (*Tiruppugazh* : "*Anathagnana*")
>
> "I am a lowly person, but you have bestowed on me such renown that it resound all over the world through these songs. I cannot forget your grace."

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He was received as a man of God wherever he went by one and all and amongst them were provincial rulers like Kalisai Sevakanar and heads of monasteries such as Somanatha, referred to in his songs. The Lord walks with him as he goes from place to place, appears to him in his dreams, and asks him to come and worship Him at Viralimalai and Vayalur, and in the guise of a Brahmin, He explains the mysteries of the *Mundakopanishad* and initiates him in all branches of knowledge and in the realisation of the eternal verity, all in a trice, as narrated in the *Tiruppugazh, Talainalir padametti"* and in the *Vedichi kavalam vakuppu.*

Then the traditional story moves on to the finale. Arunagiri meets Praudhadevaraya again and is asked by him to fetch the *parijata* flower from the heavens. He flies away in the form of a parrot leaving his body in the temple tower. When he comes back with the flower he does not find the body and he goes to Tiruttani and settles on the arm of the God on the hills as his own pet parrot, singing out of the sheer joy of his communion with the Almighty.

Arunagiri was truly a legend in his own lifetime. He was a teacher and a sage and he was looked upon as a *jivanmukta,* a liberated soul. The world in which he lived was dazzled by his towering genius in the same way that posterity is drawn to his magnetic personality both as a saint and a poet of extraordinary gifts. After the emergence of the *Tevaram* and *Divyaprabandham* of the *Nayanmars* (7th to 9th century A.D.) and the *Alwars* (5th to the 10th centuries A.D. circa), his was the most authentic and powerful voice in the realm of the devotional literature of the Tamils. A Tamil verse begins with the words *Vakkirku Arunagiri,* meaning that Arunagiri was celebrated for the grandeur and brillance of expression. He made a deliberate choice when he utilised Tamil, the language of the masses, as the medium of his message. In fact every leader of religious revival during the medieval age resorted to expression in vernacular in various parts of our country. Also they were poets

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and even musicians in many cases and thus could sway the heart of the entire populace. To Arunagiri Tamil was a treasured gift of the God of his heart, 'Balmy and life-giving like the cool, southern breeze' (*Tenral*) and 'sweet nectar which never cloys' (*ara amudu*). He was a wizard in creating phrases and out of an alloy of the richest Tamil and the most graceful Sanskrit he made jewels of expression, bewitching in their beauty and exquisite in design. The *Chandappa* or poetic form in variegated metrical patterns was made resonant with the deep-toned music welling up in his heart : it communicates to the world the shower of inspired melody issuing forth from the lyre of his music. A writer of religious poetry is necessarily constrained to paint on a circumscribed canvas, but by a few lines of verse, Arunagiri could conjure up before the mind the glorious flush of the morning sky, the rich heaviness of the scent of fruit and blossom in a tropical forest or the calm and cold beauty of nature unfolding the grief of a love-lorn maid. For pure jingle and lilt in diction, he would weave chain upon chain of words, laying bare the lure of form which language could assume. He would take the most unlikely Sanskrit expressions, string them together in the body of his poem and out of this make a garland of surprising unity and grace. Some of his *Viruttams* contain Sanskrit compounds which rival the sonority and stateliness of any master of Sanskrit prose, as in

Marana Pramada namakkillai yamenrum vaittatunai
Kiranak kalapiyum Velum unde "Kinkini mukula
Cheranapratapa Sasidevi mangalya tantu raksha
Bharana Kripakana Gnanakara Sura Bhaskarane"
(*Kandar Alankaram*)

But all this mastery of poetic craft was made by him to serve his one aim, the adoration of God.

Arunagirinatha is said to have composed 16,000 *Tiruppugazh* hymns, out of which only about 1,330 have come down to us, besides other works like *Kandar Alankaram, Kandar Antadi* and

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Kandar Anubhuti in the familiar classical metres, and the *Tiruva-Imppu* group of poems of the *Chandappa* variety. It was given to V. T. Subramania Pillai, a District munsiff of the Madras Province to preserve most of the works of the saint from oblivion. During his official tour in 1871, he was fascinated by a new *Tiruppugazh* beginning *Tadu malar mudiyalai* which he heard in Chidambaram. And he began to search for manuscripts and palm-leaf copies of the texts scattered all over the south, collected and published them in two volumes in 1894 and 1901 respectively which were subsequently brought out in fresh editions by his son V. S. Chengalvaraya Pillai.

These poems are invaluable additions to the great heritage of the Tamils. From the point of view of literature they are in a class by themselves. Arunagirinatha's equipment as a poet is encyclopaedic in range, covering as it does, Vedic lore, Puranas, agamas, mantra sastra, the Tamil classics of the Sangam era, *Tirakkural,* the work of the *Alwars, Nayanmars* and *Siddhas,* poetics and music among other branches of knowledge. He was hailed as a *Chandappavala Peruman,* a prince among *Chandappa* poets. Following in the footsteps of Tirujnanasambandar and Tirumazhisai Alwar, his achievements in this field are unique. He was an expert in handling varieties of prabandhas like *Madal, Kovai, Toodu, Nanmanimalai, Ula, Dandakam, Sindu* and *Daru.* He revels in metrical innovations and permutations in structure. He takes delight in experimenting with sounds and their variations. If it is hard consonants, he can string them in a guttural series with a heavy tread, as in :

Atraik Katraik Koppit toppit tattat tattat taruvor tan

or he can soften the consonants and work out a ring of subdued rhythms :

Tande nunde vandar vanjer tandar manjuk kuzhal manar.

Arunagiri was reputed as a *Narkavirajar,* a master of the four varieties of poetry, *Asu, Madhura, Chitra* and *Vistara.* The epithet *Muttamizh Arasu* indicates his power over the three branches of Tamil literature covering poetry, music and drama. He

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could dramatise a situation in a few lines as in the song beginning *Tondi Sariya* where he gives a moving picture of queen Kausalya fondling her child Rama. She entreats the Baby : "Come my darling son, Raghunayaka, O my precious eye, my life, my prince, you must have your milk, you must wear these flowers" and the Child draws near (*Endai varuka* etc.). Similarly there are many other episodes like the *sura samhara* by Skanda, *Tripura dahana* by Siva and different scenes from the Ramayana, the Mahabharata and Puranas depicted with equal force and vividness.

Arunagiri is an adept in portraying *Rasas* and he excels in handling *Sringara* which is featured in a very large number of his songs. When applied to mundane life and circumstances, his descriptions often reach an excessively vivid level, but this is done with the purpose of showing the fierce quality of passion and its ultimate futility and degradation. On the other hand this *rasa*, as applied by him to the relationship with Divinity, through the *nayaka-nayika* mode of presentation, is suffused with a splendour and pathos all its own. The shorter the lyric, the more poignant it becomes, so it seems. For example, the lovely damsel sighs and speaks, in the Tiruppugazh *Varimeede ezhu* :—

> *"The moon rises over the waters of the sea ;*
> *the god of love has shot forth his flowery arrow ;*
> *All the world is talking ill of me; am I to languish like this, my soul dizzy and floundering ?*
> *Armed with the spear (Vel) you pierced the mighty chest of the demon, Sura : Effulgent one, riding on the peacock, my Prince, embraced by the goddess Devasena, O Lord of the three great Gods !"*

Like the *Tiruppugazh* songs, the group poems known as *Tiruvakuppu* are also cast in *Chandappa* form, but mostly over a larger and more complicated framework. They consist of a group or string of epithets or statements woven in the shape of huge garlands of verse. Their number is given as 25 or 32 in different recensions. According to the latest research, 18 of them are recognised to be genuine. They are (1) *Sirpada vakuppu* (on the

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glory of the feet of the Lord) ; (2) *Devendra Sangam* (the greatness of the devotees) ; (3) *Vel vakuppu* (the weapon of the Lord); (4 and 5) *Tiruvelaikkaran* and *vedichi kavalan* (on Skanda, the lover of Valli, his sweetheart and bride); (6) *Peruttavachanam* (the greatness of His teaching); (7, 8, 9 and 10) *Bhutavetala Porukalattu alagai, Cheru Kolattu alagai, Porkkalattualagai vakuppu,* giving descriptions of the ghosts who danced, sang and frolicked on the battle field where the Lord fought with demon Sura; (11) *Tirujnanamai Vezham* (Divine wisdom as the Elephant in action) ; (12) *Tirukkaiyil Vazhakkam* (the gracious deeds of His hands) ; (13) *Sevakan,* the guardian ; (14) *Velvangu Vakappu* (throwing the Velat the foe);(15 and 16) *Bhuya and Kadaikkan Iyal* (on His deeds and glance) ; (17 and 18) *Sivaloka* and *Kolu* on the glory that the Lord's grace brings and the audience given by him to the elect among Gods and men. These group-poems contain a wealth of information on music, dance and puranic lore couched in Arunagirinatha's picturesque and dynamic manner.

Among the other major works of the saint, the *Kandar Alankaram* sung at Tiruvannamalai and consisting of 101 verses (107 in some collections), deals with the saint's experiences, his advice to aspirants in the spiritual path and his surrender to the Lord. The *Kandar Antadi* in 100 verses, shows the perfection of poetic skill in construction by the use of *yamaka-alankara* and the employment of only four variants of *cha* and *ta* consonants for the opening letters of the verses. The work is characterised by profundity of thought and here one comes across verses using the *Akapporul* form, the maiden-soul pining for the Lord's love and saint Tirujnanasambandar is identified as the Lord himself. The *Kandar Anubhuti* made up of 51 verses, considered to be *mantras* in potency, brings the saint's outpourings to a climax. It voices the fulfilment of his spiritual guest and it is considered to be the last of his songs. It was sung at Tiruttani, near Madras.

Apart from their poetic value, can the *Tiruppugazh* songs be treated as musical compositions and if so on what grounds ? By a careful scrutiny of Arunagirinatha's poems, we can easily recognise him to be a master musician endowed with great originality. He makes references to music which only a skilled practical

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musician could have done. His wonderful skill in creating a marvellous variety of rhythmic patterns in their application to music, his achievement in making them serve the practical needs of the art, and above all the creation of a musical style stamped with the imprint of his genius bring into focus his contribution to music as such. He belongs to the band of saints who were also composers. Like Mirabai, Purandaradasa and Tyagaraja, he preached through music and condensed philosophies in a song.

Arunagirinatha is well versed in the original Sanskrit and Tamil treatises on music and the basic concepts of musical grammar are woven by him in the texts of his songs in mellifluous combinations. The names of the seven notes of the gamut as given in the Tamil works, *viz. Kural Tuttam, Kaikkilai* etc. are indicated in the *Tiruppugazh Ariyayan Putpikka, gamakas* and the technique of singing and playing on instruments are also referred to by him. In instrumental music, he mentions the term *Pancham*, the five agents of producing music. Under stringed instruments, he enumerates Narambu, Vina, Tantiri, Tandu, Vipanchi, Kinnari, Yazh, Ambanam, and Kinaram; Vei, Kuzhal, Purikai, Sangu, Kalam and Tarai; among wind instruments, Maddalam, tavil, Dol, Tabalai Bheri, Udukkai, Devandai, Kudamuzha, Idakkai, Parai and Sakandai in the percussion group; and talam along with others in the *Kanjakkaruvi* group.

On the art of the dance he refers to maidens dancing to the singing of *Chindu,* to the accompaniment of *Nattavanurs* (dance-masters) on the maddalam, to the dance of Siva called Kodukotti, the dance of Muruga called Tudi and Kudai and to the seven types of dances like kudakkoottu etc.

Arunagiri is seen to be one of the most original among the great composers of India. Since the time of Jayadeva (11th Century A.D.) new trends had developed in composition, e.g., the *Kirtana* form evolved by the Haridasas of Karnataka and the Tallapaka composers of Andhra Pradesh. Parallel to the *Marga* and *Desi Talas* given in the *Sangita Ratnakara* (1247 A.D. Circa), the *Sapta Suladi Talas* (which are the basis of

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Karnataka music of the present day) came into prominence. Sripadaraya (1422-80 A.D.), a contemporary of Arunagirinatha, has composed a *Suladi* employing the *Suladi Talas.* Tallapakam Annamacharya (1408-1507 A.D.) has also used these *Talas.* Arunagiri drew liberally from both sources and in addition he created his own patterns in amazing profusion. And herein lies the crowning glory of his achievement. Instead of the *Pallavi, Anupallavi* and *Charana,* he adopts his own form, which in essential is a development of the quatrain, where each *pada* is elobrated in a stanza of length (usually limited to four syllables corresponding to the mnemonic form *Tana-tana* or *tanda-tana* serving as refrain. The *chandam* or grouping of syllables is determined according to his choice and the entire song is built on this basic structure. In the elaborated patterns we come across *Tritra, Chaturasra, Khanda,* Misra and *Sankirna* groupings, arising out of *Sapta Tala Jati* system, arrangements of 10, 11, 12 and 13 syllables are also employed according to the *Shodasangti-matra* group system. Moreover we find equivalents of the *Sapta Talas* as practised at present. Attempts have been made recently to identify some of the patterns with the 120 *Desi Talas* of the *Sangita Ratnakara* like *Laghuse-kharam, Hamsa, Rajavidyadhara, Kokilapriya, etc.* In addition, it is interesting to see the correspondence between some Sanskrit metres and the *Chandams* of *Tiruppugazh.* For instance, *Kalanar Venkodum Dutrapa Sangoden* agrees with *malati vrittam* and *sivama Dudane Anubho Gamadai* with *Totaka vrittam.* Many more illustrations of other *vrittas* could be given. Being a master of rhetoric and poetics in both Sanskrit and Tamil, Arunagirinatha might have drawn his metrical patterns from all these sources.

In the *Bhutavetala vakuppu* the names of the five *Margi Talas Chachatputa, Chachaputa, Shatpitaputraka, Sanpodveshtaka* and *Udghatta* are given as well as names of many *Ragas* like *Varali, Gaudi, Bhairavi, Lalita, Malahari, Bauli, Patamanjari, Dhanyasi,* etc. Similar information is available in *Porukalathu alakai* and *Bhuya Vakuppus.* And names of *Panns,* melody-types of Tamil

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music, like *Kurinji* and *Indalam* also occur in the songs. The original tunes of the hymns however, have been mostly lost. The *Tiruppugazh* songs have been largely in the custody of musicians. Danseuses and *oduvars* (musicians) attached to temples and *Mathas* (monastaries) and the melodic settings have not come down in a standardised form, though some stray items like *Nada bindu Kaladi and Charanakamalalayattai* have uniformly accepted tunes. It was Vallimalai Swami Satchidananda who worked streunously to popularise *Tiruppugazh* among the people from 1917 onwards. As musicial items *Tiruppugazh* songs have come to stay on the concert platform. Viewing it on the whole, one cannot but be struck with wonder on the stupendous nature of what Arunagirinatha achieved in the sphere of music.

In the works of Arunagirinatha, there is ample evidence regarding his inner life, and his attitude to religion and philosophy. There are passages in *Tiruppugazh* expressive of the saint's remorse for having the empty life, ridden with passion and sensuous thirst, of the ordinary run of mortals. It must be remembered that similar references are found in the works of Sankara and other Acharyas like the Alwars and Nayanamars. Besides this, the Indian temperament has always evinced a penchant for making good or evil prominent by contrast, or if there is no contrast, for creating it. The account of the wayward life in Arunagiri's songs is an instance of this kind. Also a great soul is agonised by the mere remembrance of the fell power of *anadi avidya* (original ignorance) and our gurus often uttered warnings against its influence by reference to experiences cited by them as if their own but which were not such in fact, Arunagirinatha must have lived the life of a normal house-holder, but after his renunciation of the world he could only look upon that life with grief and repentance and expressed this mood in many of his songs. In the *Tiruppugazh Unai dinam tozhudilan* he says :

"I have not carried on your worship day after day. In my talk I did not extol you, nor have I bowed down at your feet, decking them with flowers. I do not ponder on how your

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devotees dwelt in your heart. I do not go round your shrine with love. There is no desire in me to sing your glory. . . But do come riding on your peacock and save me".

His remorse is even stronger in the song *Mulamantiram odal ingilai.*

"Here there is no chanting of your *mulamantra,* no liberal giving of aid to those in want, no observance of silence, no wisdom. But there is infatuation for women and deep sensual thirst. There is offence and transgression. I am wallowing in the quagmire of the fallen derelicts. Grant me your grace. . ."

In a similar vein he expresses contrition for not having studied the Vedas, *Nalan Veda noolagamadi Nan Odineenumilai.* But on the other hand his knowledge of the scriptural texts and observances are clearly borne out by his reference to the *Gayatri, Pranayama,* the tending of the three sacred fires, *surya namaskara, homa, tarpana,* the *Mantras Shadakshara, Panchakshara, Ashtakshara,* the *Pranava,* the *Ajapa mantra* and the *Mahavakya* "Tat tvam asi". He had the greatest respect for *sanatana dharma.* He speaks of *Ashtanga yoga* in detail, but warns that Yoga should not end up in a barren mastery of its technique without leading to spiritual realisation :

"Wherefore all this miserable wandering in devious paths, by shaving the head, donning orange robes, having matted locks, wearing tiger skins, learning religious crafts, smearing sacred ash on the forehead in thick layers, entering the trammels of worldly pursuits and trying to procure gold by alchemy . . . Protect me from these aberrations."
(*Tiruppugazh "Talaiyai mazhittu"*).

Arunagiri lived during a period of keen religious controversy. He speaks of the heated debates between "Buddhists, the followers of *Karma Kanda,* Turushkas, *Mayavadins,* the adherents of Kapila and Kanada, *Lokayatas,* practitioners of *Vama marga* and the *Bhairava* cult", and prays to the Lord for the wisdom which is beyond such wranglings (in *Tiruppugazh "Kalaikodu*

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Bavuddhar". He believes that only wholehearted devotion (*Bhakti*) and pure spiritual wisdom (*jnana*) can lead the aspirant to the ultimate goal. And he preaches the gospel of love as a means towards this and love for God and love for men, i.e. one's fellow-beings. He lays great stress on compassion and charity again and again, in *Kandar Alankaram* and elsewhere ; 'Give at least a handful of rice to the hungry', he says. He wants to heal the wounds and assuage the sorrows of suffering humanity. For he asserts that Jiva is Siva ("Jivan Sivasorupa menateri") in *Tiruppugazh "Tenundu Mukkani Kal"* and this credo leads him on to the core of his message, viz., the unity of all spiritual experiences and the oneness that exists behind the diversity of the universe. His poems are all addressed to Kumara but it must be said that in the whole range of his compositions he displays a noble liberality of religious outlook and looks with the eyes of a Vedantin on the various deities of the Hindu pantheon. He could be claimed to have exerted a wholesome unifying influence on his contemporaries with the aim of harmonising the superficial differences of diverse sects of Hinduism and he did affect a synthesis between the doctrines of the Saivites and the Vaishnavites. He sang with the same fervour and dedication about the *lilas* of Rama, Krishna and other *Avataras* of Vishnu as when he described the dance of Siva, the grace of Skanda or the glory of Devi.

Here is the glowing description of the 'visvarupa' of Vishnu :

> "He is the sky, wherein the clouds gladly dwell. He is the air, the water, the fierce and mighty fire. He is the earth encircled by the ocean. He is hailed by the seven worlds and seven luminous orbs. He is verily 'Thou' and 'I'. He is Brahma seated on the lotus, why, He is your Sankara. He is these rows and rows of universes and the Ether beyond. And He transcends them all, this Lord of Maya, Maha Vishnu. . . Skanda, you are His nephew. Bless me. . ."
>
> (In *Tiruppugazh "Mangul imburu"*)

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Arunagirinatha shows an intimate acquaintance with the literature of Vedanta and his hymns expounding pure Advaita echo the majesty and appeal of the *Upanishads*. In fact some of the grandest Upanishadic expressions are incorporated verbatim in a number of his poems. He sings in ecstasy :

> "It cannot be seen with the eye. It has form and it is formless. One cannot speak of it, yet it inspires speech. It pervades the final reaches of the four Vedas. It resides in the meshes of this body made of the five elements but the body does not comprehend its mystery. One cannot approach it nor talk of it as an embodied person. It is the light which shines beyond the ken of the Gods of creation and preservation. It is the constant in the variations of the world. It is *Bindu, Nada* and *Kala, Jnana, Turiya* and what is beyond, the fulfilment of my penance, grace abounding, the One, that is You."

(In *Tiruppugazh "Kanonadadu"*)

He makes loving references to the *Bhagavad Gita* which show what a tremendous hold the Lord's song had on him. In the lines beginning "Battark-kiradattai kadaviya" and "parkunanai vetripera" we find the narration :

> "Krishna, charming like the blue cloud, drove the chariot of his beloved devotee to the battlefield. He expounded the Great Truth and removed the fear in the heart of Phalguna, who achieved victory by His Grace".

But like the rest of the great religious teachers he found that the abstract conclusions of Vedanta have no definite reality for the ordinary individual and hence he powerfully advocates

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saguna upasana and the path of love or *Bhakti,* stating his case irrefutably in the verse *"Vele Vilangu Kaiyan".*

Vele-Vilangu Kaiyan Sayya talinit veezhndirainji
Male Kola vingan Kanbaadalial maha vakku geya
Lala yadaidark karida yaru vuru vagi yovru
Pole girukkum porulai yevvaru pukalvaduve

"Except by falling at the rosy feet of Kumara, carrying the lance in his hands, to beseech him for grace and gaze at Him, dizzy with joy, how else could one describe the ultimate Truth-substance, which cannot be reached by the mind, speech or action, which seems to be formless and yet with form, and appears to be the one behind the Many !" (*Kandar Alankaram*).

He expounds the meaning of 'Shanmukha' in the lines *"Ana Tani mantra"* wherein he says :

"I have not realised that the six faces (of Kumara) signify all that is blessed at the beginning and end of things, nor have I known that the Dancing Peacock is the image of the *mantra* which shines in solitary splendour, Omkara" His significant description of how Skanda embraced Valli uttering the sacred syllable *Om* vindicates the merging of the *Jivatman* into the *Paramatman.*

Summing up his transcendental experience in his ascent towards Godhead, he exclaims :

Battit Tirumukam arudan panniru tolgalumai
Tittit tirukku hamadu kandan sayan mandadang
Buttik Kamalat turugip perukip puvona metrit
Tattik karaipu ralumpara mananda sagaratte.

"In the lotus of my consciounsness, the great ocean of bliss rolls on and in waves upon waves dashes against the shores, flowing over them and the whole world, and in this mighty flood I saw the glorious form with the six benign faces and twelve

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hands; sweetest nectar ! And all action in me was at an end." (*Battit-tirumukham Arudan Kandar Alankaram*).

He has one boon to ask of the Lord : "My Master assign to me only one task, that is to sing of your dancing peacock (*omkara*), the *Vel ayudha* (Jnana Shakti) and the lovely cock (on your flagstaff, heralding the dawn of wisdom)". His God lets him have his way and finally gives the *upadesa* (sacred instruction): "Be thou quiet, be thou silent, giving up speech" *Summairu Sollara* vide verses *Adum Parivel* and *Semman magalai* in *Kandar Anubhuti*. And thereafter he lost all awareness of the objective world and became one with the Supreme Being.

This great saint-singer has ever since dominated the life and thought of the masses from generation to generation through his soul-stirring songs and led them on like a beaconlight towards godliness. And the impact of his message is truly reflected in the magnificent tribute paid to him by Tayumanava Svami (1595—1661 AD Circa), one of the greatest of Tamil Saints, in the following words :

Kandaranubhuti petruk kandaranubhuti sonna

Vendai yarunadi yirukku nalennalo

"My Sire Arunagirinatha, out of his experiences of God, spoke and gave us *Kandar Anubhuti*. Oh, when shall I seek his grace and walk along the path shown by him." (in Verse "*Kandar anubhuti*" of "*Ennatkanni*")

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CULTURAL LEADERS OF INDIA

India has had a long line of saints and mystics who, steeped in the deep wisdom of the ancients, brought the results of their own experiences for the common man. It has been easier for the people to imbibe the fundamental truths and eternal values when told through the medium of the song in the local language. Whether the homily is against hypocrisy and corruption or the futility of form and ritual, it is usually found best administered when offered with similes and symbols or satire and sarcasm. The object of these seers was to establish sincerity of faith and integration of the whole man. Since they were always on the move, these minstrels of God kept up the morale of the people by emphasising the superiority of spiritual values over mundane pursuits.

The present volume includes twelve of these personalities. The authors of the lives of the various saints are scholars in their language and experts in their respective fields of literature and culture.

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